

THE
STRIKING
HOURS
BY
EDEN
PHILLPOTTS



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THE STRIKING HOURS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

LYING PROPHETS

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

SONS OF THE MORNING

ALSO BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HUMAN BOY



TORQUAY

"LITTLE SILVER"

DINHAM

THE STRIKING HOURS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

"GOD HAS SO ARRANGED THE CHRONOMETRY OF OUR SPIRITS THAT
THERE SHALL BE THOUSANDS OF SILENT MOMENTS BETWEEN
THE STRIKING HOURS"

DR. MARTINEAU

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TO
ROBERT MURRAY GILCHRIST
—MASTER OF THE SHORT STORY—
THESE,
FROM HIS TRUE FRIEND

CONTENTS

	PAGE
SAM OF SORROW CORNER	I
THE RED ROSE	27
THE MAIDEN BELL	44
RIGHT OF WAY	63
ANOTHER LITTLE HEATH-HOUND	82
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE	101
PROVIDENCE AND TIM MUDGE	118
"CHERRY RIPE"	137
A WITCH	154
THE BEST OF THREE FALLS	175
TO GIGLET MARKET	199
TOLD TO CHAPLAIN	221
AN OLD TESTAMENT MAN	240
THE DEVIL'S TIGHT-ROPE	258

SAM OF SORROW CORNER

I

THERE he dwelt obscurely, and dreamed away a dim life, separated from all other men by the circumstance of mental infirmity. The exact nature of this hiatus none could estimate. His fellows held him merely weak of intellect, called him "Soft Sam," and regarded him for the most part with that charity and smiling tolerance proper from the strong to the weak. His widowed aunt, Mrs. Martha Coaker, with whom he lived, declared him a great man, spoiled in the making by some folly or misfortune of his mother before he was born; and those of sympathetic nature, who had won Sam's trust, quite agreed with her. He was, as it seemed, a soul that had been destined for

2 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

some dizzy journey along the razor-edge, where great wits travel between genius and insanity; he had slipped over the precipice, yet not fallen to the black bottom of it, but now hung suspended, caught up above the darkness in a sort of sad-coloured twilight, where the intellectual night of him was illuminated by sun-gleams of thought, stranger and more beautiful than those of men wholly sane. His ideas were such as came to the great child-hearts of the Norse folk when first they began to glean hidden poetry from things animate and inanimate; when first they wrought and gloried in their rough-hewn Titan images of primal passions, of love and hate, of death and the life beyond it. Soft Sam won his dreams from sunlight and moonlight; from the song of birds and the breaking of buds; from thunder grumbling over the granite of his remote moorland home; from crying of lonely rivers; from the cryptic writings of the Everlasting found by him, as shall be shown, in strange places at the time of the spring.

Sorrow Gap, so called because here a man slew his sweetheart in days long past,

lay at the edge of the great woods spread upon the fringes of northern Dartmoor, hard by to Little Silver. Heavy forests of beech and pine fledged the foot-hills of the Moor, and above them broke away some of the most austere and lofty fastnesses within the great tableland of Devon. Grey granite crowned the heights, and far-flung fells glimmered across the tremendous acclivities. The spectacle of this solemn waste, undulating against the sky-line and dimmed by distance, daily greeted Sam's eyes; and the Moor, as it passed through changeful phases of the year, influenced his life like a sentient intellect, although he knew it not. Each annual aspect of the great apparition that dominated his small world found answering echoes in this man. Now the waste gleamed snowcapped through weeks of hard winters; now shone softened in all its sombre planes under the green blade of spring; now bore varying purple of heather and of cloud shadows in summer days; now displayed the amethyst miracle of the ling; and now sank again to the sere though splendid pageants of

4 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

golden brake fern and crimson briar. He knew the phenomena of trembling heat and stealthy mist ; he had watched the air quiver when the sacred stones, set up by the "old men," danced in their secret places at high noon ; the little lonely wail of the yellow-hammer and the crisp drum-beat of grasshoppers were his music ; a hundred times he had watched while the silver and grey vapours, valley-born, wound their soft arms round the granite crowns of the hills ; he had seen them play strange pranks in the heart of the inviolable region ; he had beheld the Mother o' Mist in her hiding-places ; had felt her morning robe brush his gaunt face at peep of day, when a rising sun turned her raiment honeysuckle colour.

He knew the Moor, indeed, from a close, lifelong intimacy, as did few other men at Little Silver ; and a great part of his days were spent in the bosom of it, by moss and stream, or upon the spacious slopes and clatters where the whortle-berries grew. Here he dwelt in loneliness and brooding, and much deep searching in the eyes of wild flowers. His aunt's cottage lay a mile from

the village, and he seldom sought the quaint congeries of scattered cots, the church, the manor house, or the old ruined castle rising beside it, mantled in ivy and crowned with mountain ash. Indeed, the civilisation of Little Silver, slightly obvious as it was, alarmed him. The bricks and mortar, the vehicles, the flocks, the barking dogs and shouting men, made up for Sam a bewildering centre of human activity. He cowered at being so much in the world, became nervous and fretful, grew more inarticulate than usual, and uttered strange grunts and growls when acquaintances nodded recognition and gave him "good-day." Much, also, he feared running the gauntlet of sundry small public-houses at Chagford; and when lumbering past these places with long, thin shanks, and toes turned out a world too far for symmetry, he not seldom smarted at the laughter of base fellows and idle persons, there assembled to take rest from doubtful callings as the working day waned. One mean soul was ever regarded by Sam as his special foe. Indeed, the man, Thomas Blight, appeared hostile to all honest folks—

6 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

a common enemy, who scared the respectable from his side of the road, who lived a disreputable life on the fringes of other men's game coverts, and who, having shortened the days of his young wife by persevering brutality, now seemed set upon doing the like for a little girl of six years old, whose unhappy fate it was to be his daughter. This poaching, drunken vagabond had presented a case peculiarly interesting to the student of character by reason of his most unusually positive qualities. To meet a very wicked or extremely virtuous man is an equally uncommon experience ; but in Thomas Blight the shade was as dark as any most exacting audience had needed in its villain, while of redeeming traits not the most lenient could pretend to find a trace. Yet, brutal and coarse, debased and drunken as was his life and conversation, the poacher affected to love his daughter with a proper paternal affection, and he refused the offer of more than one well-meaning creature who, for love of little children, had proposed to give this unhappy maid a home.

There came an evening of spring when

Sam, who made long speeches to his aunt in the privacy of their cottage, though he spoke rarely enough outside it, declared a new message to old Mrs. Coaker, and gabbled volubly of awakened interests dependent on the life of the young year.

"'Tis borne in upon me," he began in a strange, hollow voice that rumbled, rose, sank, and suddenly died away in his cleft palate—" 'tis borne in upon me that theer's more o' the will o' God set out clear afore human folks than what they've so far larned."

"For sartin, dearie. We'm all mighty backward in graspin' hold of it. Though 'tis in the Book, I doubt. But who 'mongst men ever read all that be written theer wi' a onder-standin' heart?"

"Not that Book I doan't mean, but the book o' the flowers o' the field."

"Ay, Sam, no doubt 'pon it; they teaches tu, an' us larns their uses, like Mother Strick, as makes anise an' dill water, an' organy tea, an' various caucherries for ills in man an' beast; though whether 'tis the inner vartue she do draw out o' the herbs, or charms an' magic, got by crooked dealin's wi' powers o'

8 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

darkness, I'd fear to say. She ban't jonic for sartain, though God forbid as I should so much as think ill of her, for I might hear of it again to my hurt. Her's awverlooked more'n wan poor body, 'tis vouched for."

The man shook his head impatiently.

"Ban't what's hid in the juices of grawing things—gude an' evil, balm an' poison. 'Tis what's written 'pon the awpen flowers."

"Lor', dearie! Writ on 'em! Theer's nought writ 'pon 'em. What be tellin' about?"

"More'n I know; but I'll go deeper yet. Theer's voices in my head night time of late. An' they speaks to me an' sez, 'Read, read, read the writin' o' spots an' strange splashes an' dark signs as you'll find 'pon the leaves o' adder's meat* in airly springtime, an' 'pon the petals o' crumple lilies,† an' orange lilies in the garden, an' the words o' the new-born flowers as do lie in the speckled throats of foxgloves 'pon the Moor, an' the yellow archangels, an' many another weed I knaws.' An' I ups an' sez to the voices, 'Why for?'

* Adder's meat = wild arum.

† Crumple lilies = martagons.

An' they sez, 'Cause theer you'll find the writin' of A'mighty God set out year after year an' century 'pon century. An' that was the why He put flowers 'pon the airth; an' 'tis likewise wi' the eggs o' the birds. An' 'tis for you to find out an' tell it afore all men.' So the voices said to me, I do assure 'e."

"What a thought! But doan't set no weight to it, for 'twas surely a dream, an' will make your head ache cruel, my dear."

"'Tis hard work for the brain; but I lay the spots an' splashes will come right in gude time. Ess, they'll twist an' turn like the Writin' 'pon the Wall; an' I'll read the truth an' go down to Chagford market-place on a market day an' shout it out afore all men."

"An' so you shall, then."

"Ess fay; but not all to wance. I doubt I'll do it afore I die, not sooner. Sometimes I can almost see a letter here an' theer, an' I sweat wi' joy, an' thinks I be gwaine to read out a bit of God's awn sense, come straight from Him to me; then it changes an' doan't mean nothin', an' I tries again, allus peering for what's surely theer, though hid from me."

10 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

"You'll keep me mazed to my last hour wi' your cranks, Sam. Now come an' eat your supper an' doan't hurt your poor dear head thinkin' tu close 'bout difficult things."

"I tawld passon, but he didn't set no gert hold 'pon it; an' I tawld young Bill Karslake the constable, an' he said as 'tweer a well thought 'pon thing an' a comely deed in me to seek out bud an' egg by hedge and field. So I be gwaine to look to it diligent, in the name o' the Lard."

"Sure, you couldn't put trust in no better, dearie. Now come an' eat your meat."

Unlike other of his quaint fancies, that came as shadows and vanished as quickly, this conceit of Soft Sam's held powerful sway upon him, and he devoted the short days of February and March to his curious researches. Then there came an evening towards the end of the latter month when, wandering beside a hedge where the wild arums grew, Sam ran fair upon his enemy and met him at an unfortunate moment, for Mr. Blight had just taken a fine hare from a wire set in a run leading from the woods

spread above Sorrow Gap to the high road that encircled them. The nature of the offence was viewed not as a crime against society or Captain Yeoland, Lord of the Manor, whose hare the poacher now knocked upon the head without ceremony; but, to Sam, life itself seemed a sacred thing, and now, conceiving that he had witnessed a murder, the imbecile soul called down lightnings from heaven against his enemy, and made such a tremendous commotion at the spinney-edge that Blight told him roughly to shut his mouth and depart. But the other grew hot in his wrath, shook a fist full of wild flowers in the poacher's face, and gabbled on with strange gasps and gurgles, raising his voice each moment louder. Whereupon Thomas set his passion free, dropped the hare, and, falling upon unfortunate Sam, brutally belaboured the lank carcass of him until he screamed and wept for pain.

"Now get about your business, you brainless cake! If I had my way the likes o' you'd be drowned same as blind kittens, an' gude riddance tu! Never you dare to lift

your eyes to me more ; an' if you breathe wan word against me for this, I'll tell Mother Strick to send the Gabriel hounds to 'e by night, as'll tear your liver out an' eat it afore your face ! So mind what I sez ; an' next time I catches you spyin' 'pon me, I'll welt the hide off your bones an' give the gashly, slack-twisted carcass of 'e to the crows ; so keep you from my path hencefarrard !”

But the other showed no fear before these grim and ghastly promises. His wet eyes blazed, and he cried his answer aloud in a voice that echoed and rumbled through the woods.

“ Take heed to yourself, you black-hearted dowl ! Take heed, and knaw as God in heaven can judge between gude an' evil still. You'll roast yet, an' if mine be the hand to pile the faggots an' light the hell-fire under 'e, His will be done. I'll pay you, I'll pay you for this ; I'll find the secret written against you ; I'll never rest by day or night till your book be closed an' the mark of the Beast set on it. Thief ! Murderer ! Shedder of innocent blood ! 'Twas the likes o' you as nailed the Lard to the cross ; an' theer

eternal torment you'll share, please God, if theer's justice in heaven!"

He raved on, waking wood-echoes long asleep, and for many minutes after Thomas Blight had disappeared, the man with his hair wild about his neck, with blood and earth smearing his face, and a great light of insane passion in his eyes, stalked here and there, gibbering and growling, now pulling his hands through his beard, now shaking them after his vanished foe.

II

When another year had passed, and another winter ended the period of the flowers, Sam Coaker announced with regret that neither martagon in spring nor foxglove in summer had revealed the secrets he sought with such piety and determination. With the dawn of the next awakening; with the renewed life written upon his world, when the Mother lit again the little lamps of the celandines, thickened the naked elm-branches with blossoms and marked everywhere an

undefined, subtle sense of change in hill and valley, that told how she was turning in her sleep—when in fact, bird and wind and vernal rain upon the river sang spring to him, Soft Sam reviewed his great theory and pursued another branch of it than that represented by the flowers.

Thus he spoke of the matter to his aunt upon a day in March :—

“ I found a robin’s nest behind the wood-stack this mornin’—wan egg laid, an’ t’ others to come ; an’ ’pon the shell of un was more writin’ of God or angel, by the look of it. An’ through the time of eggs I be gwaine to seek, for many theer be which have writin’ ’pon ’em set out clearer far than redbreasts’. The moorhens, wheer they twists nestes o’ dead sedges in the upspringing living wans, an’ sets ’em up like islands in the ponds, have eggs all writ awver in purple ; an’ gladdy*—theer’m butivul, fine, holy penmanship ’pon his li’ll egg, if a man could read it ; an’ titlark, an’ heath-lark, an’ linnet, an’ a plenty more of ’em, tu, as I knaws about.”

“ A busy, wonnerful man, you be ! Never

* Gladdy = yellow-hammer.

seed the like of 'e. But go your ways in peace wi'out fret or worry, an' doan't 'e get in a tear if you can't make nothin' of such high matters."

"No, no; I awnly hopes 'tis left for me to read God's riddles here an' theer. I tries my hardest, an' if I ban't man o' brains enough, then the truth of it must bide hid in egg an' bud till another, what He've blessed wi' deeper onderstandin', do come to His call."

"An' take heed wheer you wanders, Sam, for Squire Yeoland doan't let no man go in his woods, whether he be of gude name like you, or a hatch-mouthed sinner same as Tom Blight."

Sam's face grew dark.

"Ess fay! He'm theer awften enough, the blot! Murderer as he be!"

"Not so bad as that, my dearie. Murder's tu gert awful-soundin' a word for slaughter of bird or beast; though, come that, I mind a time when squire's gran'faither was livin', an' gentlefolks all—them as kept a tidy head o' game—reckoned how 'twas worse'n murder to lay finger on feather or fur.

Spring guns was laid in them days, an' gert traps wi' steel teeth, like crocodiles', teeled for men. Many a leg was broken, an' many a poor auld blid goes short o' wan side to this hour, thanks to them savage times. Not but us may hope as Blight will turn from his sins an' reform, as becomes a widow man what takes a second."

"Never! Born to be hanged in this world an' roasted in next! Evil's the marrow in his bones! An' her no better—a dark, ill-favoured piece, larned in magic as weern't never got from no gude plaace—from Bible or book of saints neither; but all word o' mouth, handed on an' on by wan evil-doer to another, from the Witch o' Ender to Tamsin Strick."

"Tamsin Blight, now—a parlous match for sartain. Both comes of bad havage* by all accounts; but us must hope as 'twill end well. 'Twas a ill wind as blawed gude to wan tibby lamb, anyways; for his li'l darter Susan, be gone off to her mother's folks up Exeter way."

* Havage = stock, ancestry.

Their conversation thus drifted to the man Thomas Blight, and his arrangements for personal happiness.

After the season of Christmas, a nine days' wonder burst upon the village when it was announced that the wise woman, Thomasin Strick, had promised to marry as big a rascal as Little Silver might boast since historic days. That the sorceress could thus trust her person to such an one as Blight served, indeed, to discount her reputation for exceptional sagacity. People even pitied her, and foretold a dismal life for Mrs. Strick as soon as she should change her name. But it appeared that she knew her business best. Something in the outlawed and irreclaimable Blight appealed to her. She, too, excited little amiable emotion in other hearts. Her fame bred awe, fear, distrust; and she knew that when men and women had approached her with money for the things she sold, they always spat over their left shoulders after they had gone from her sight, and were thankful to be away. But, while little likely to bring either contracting party much lasting joy, the match

18 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

indirectly benefited one other. Small Susan Blight was refused admission to the cottage of the wise woman. She even made matrimony conditional on the departure of the child; and Tom, ready enough to oblige, conveyed the girl to her mother's folk two days before his wedding.

Now poacher and witch, as Little Silver hesitated not to describe them, were man and wife; and already, though three months had scarcely passed, rumour told of dissension overheard by passers-by. That Parson Smedley had consented to marry such a couple at all was matter for no small wonder among the more strenuous of his flock; and to these it seemed that such forces, sinister enough apart, must, thus augmented each by the other, tend towards perdition with speed much increased.

Thus stood the matter that Sam and his ancient aunt discussed, and it was within ten days of their conversation that the madman's stubborn search for God's direct message on a wild bird's egg, or within the throat of woodland flower, brought him to a tangible discovery, and furnished at last results both

definite and terrific for those that they involved.

His wandering explorations took him far afield, and with increased experience he became deeply versed in the manners of the birds. Now he haunted the waste places, and great brakes of tall spring furze that flamed along the moors; scanned the eggs of the linnets and yellow-hammers; hunted the heaths for the dark, mottled treasures of the larks; risked his life in reaching a kestrel's nest on a dizzy pine-top; strode ungainly over the great glimmering ridges where once Elizabethan miners streamed for tin; and wandered ceaselessly, himself like some dun-coloured ghost from the past, about deserted regions of human industry or sepulture: gravel-pits and cairns, black peat cuttings and rifled barrows.

His discovery was made within a coomb or valley on the high moor, where, between the shoulders of two separate hills, extended a farm, snugly enough situated, with hopeful "newtakes" climbing upwards on either side. To the clink of a plough and the shrilling of larks, Soft Sam passed on his

way, left the homestead behind him, and pushed forward to the head of a ruin, whose foundations were already vanishing amid the young green things of the new year. It lay a mile from the life of the farm beneath, was surrounded by woodland, and about the crumbling fabric, whose decayed bones stood knee-deep in briar and bramble, nettle and dock, a few Portugal laurels, grown to the dignity of trees, shone lustrous behind the lemon-green catkins of hazel and silver birch, and the mistiness of budding rowan. Rough stones were scattered through the ruin; great silence reigned there. As Sam pushed into the tangles of new vegetable life and the skeletons of fern and gaunt, umbelliferous growths that had flourished long since and still stood in death, his nose was greeted with the sharp scent of herb Robert, bruised under his feet, and his ears gladdened by the flutter of invisible wings. Through the rough, choked labyrinths of the ruin he climbed and struggled. It was a home of feathered things, and many a protest from blackbird below and grey-headed jackdaw in the ivy above challenged the explorer; but

these he heeded not, and peered industriously hither and thither, with his fingers in many a secret nursery of little fowls. Then, when nearly at the end of his journey, he chanced upon a hedge-sparrow's nest, and was turning away from the pure, sky-blue egg—as one not chosen of the Master for His utterances—when some trick of sunbeam called back his eyes again ere they roved forward into the next thicket. So he turned, stared, narrowed his gaze for more microscopic scrutiny; then, possessed by a strange thought, uttered inarticulate sounds, like a well-pleased dog, dragged the nest from its place, emptied the eggs upon the ground, all heedless of the mother's cry; and at last, wrapping it up tenderly in a red cotton handkerchief, buttoned his coat about the thing, made all possible expedition out of the ruin, and set off—as fast as his thin legs could cover the ground—for his home, eight good miles distant. He shouted to himself as he went, hugged the empty nest, cried out to heaven, and thanked God familiarly for some prodigious deed of grace. Then, passing the door of his home without stop-

22 SAM OF SORROW CORNER

ping at it, he paddled into Little Silver, for once passed the "Green Man" without a shadow of fear, approached the police-station, and asked for his friend, Bill Karslake, a young constable, who had shown Sam kindness on more than one occasion.

The matter of the man's discovery was vital; the significance he drew from it no less than murder. He knew the materials each bird employed in building, and that hair should line the hedge-sparrow's small home was no matter for wonder; but yet the circumstance had made him stare, then gasp, and finally shout aloud; for it was hair like spun gold that twined in the coarser fabric of the nest—thread on thread of delicate, bright hair from a human head. And speculating upon the mystery, Soft Sam was suddenly smitten with a terrific thought, stung to savage joy as the dire probability of his suspicion ripened to a dreadful certainty. The conviction had quickened all his pulses like strong drink; he was, indeed, intoxicated by the idea; and some minutes elapsed before he could make his meaning intelligible to the patient

man who now struggled to understand him. Sam showed the nest, gabbled out his opinion concerning it, and made Bill Karslake's face grow hard.

"For God's love, lad, doan't bawl so loud! 'Tis libel, an' worse, onless us can prove it. Not but what I've had a grain of doubt in me all along, knawin' the parties. You seek again to-morrow—seek as never you seeked afore, under stone an' stock an' leaf, round about everywheers—an' if theer's more to find, I lay you'll find it. Maybe the tale 'bout gwaine to Exeter be true, an' if 'tis us'll get news of her theer; but maybe it ban't, an' us'll find all that's left of her somewheers else, poor li'l' twoad."

"Her young hair, I tell 'e—I knaw; I'll take a holy oath to it; the colour o' kernin' corn!"

"Keep your mouth close shut, that's all; not half a word to a sawl, for if this here black thought of yourn be true, an' Blight gets wind of it, us'll have to whistle when the time comes to take un. Keep so dumb as a adder if you want to get upsides wi' the man."

“I’ve sworned so to do, an’ I’ll not open my lips again till I see you. Red murder ’tis, an’ the secret, what he hid so careful, telled to me by silly birds at the biddin’ of the Lord o’ Hosts! You bide an’ see what next daylight’s like to shaw me. An’ keep thicky under lock an’ key, for weak as the li’l’ maid’s hair do seem, ’twill spin a rope for that anointed rascal, praise be to God!”

By morning light Sam was back at the ruin under a grey dawn; and there, in feverish anxiety to prove the guilt of his enemy, he came near to losing his own life. At the head of a matted tangle of undergrowth and broken wall, concealed by covering of brambles, ivy, and woodbine in young leaf, Sam came upon a yawning well-mouth, and only saved himself from falling into it by flinging his body sideways to the ground and gripping the crumbling masonry over which his feet had already slipped. Safe once more, he peered eagerly downward, flung a stone, and heard it fall on dry earth far below. Then it was that the tell-tale gold met his eye again; and, over against him, where a blackthorn now powdered with

blossom bent above the well, there hung a little wisp of bright hair, shining to the touch of the sun now risen. The lock, most surely snatched from a young head, now hung like a star above an open grave, as Sam believed; and, marking the spot with care by private signs, he tramped home again.

By ten o'clock he had imparted the news, and hearing it, Karslake approached his inspector. The matter was grave enough to command instant action, and, within two hours, a small party, recruited by the doctor and one Ned Loveys, a man of valour and renown, set forth under Sam's guidance, while a couple of trustworthy officers were sent to keep secret watch on the suspected sinner.

Soon enough the deep, dry well gave up its dead, and the little body of Susan Blight was found where her father had thrown her. The man seemed scarcely to regret discovery; made callous confession upon arrest, and volunteered the further opinion that his child might be happier out of the world than in it. His wife, to do her justice, had no

knowledge of the crime, and when the child-murderer paid his debt, in a red dawn behind red walls at Exeter, she exhibited the most stoical indifference. This attitude appeared reasonable enough to Little Silver. That Thomasin could abstain from display of absolute satisfaction surprised those about her, and was counted to her for righteousness by a few, for affectation by the many.

And Sam of Sorrow Corner took no small glory from his achievement ; for there grew up anew about him the antique superstition that one of weak wit may be the chosen messenger and mouthpiece of Almighty God. Soft Sam's wanderings not seldom had secret watchers, for men and women held themselves fortunate if, unseen, they chanced to overhear, in his muttered self-communings, some shred or scrap of coherent sense. Thereupon they would depart well pleased in the conviction that they had listened, as the patriarchs of old time, to the voice of the Everlasting.

THE RED ROSE

WHEER I lived to as a maiden, folks believed anything you told 'em, an' for that matter theer be other plaaces beside Little Silver wheer men an' women are awnly tu ready for any new thing. But they say the times o' signs an' wonders is past now—long past away—an' my gran'childern do laugh at me, an' my sayin's. Teacher to school larns 'em different now-adays, though I doubt theer's things worth knawin' still, such as a body's manners to his betters, as these here new-fangled schools can't teach the bwoys an' gals, 'cause them as be set up in authority doan't know theerselves what's comely an' what ban't. That's neither here nor theer, but I reckon the wisdom o' God doan't change wi' the larnin' o' men, an' what vartue was

put in the herb o' the field be theer still, though no man plucks it now. An' other things deeper yet, things handed down from generation to generation by white witches, an' black tu, for that matter. I knaw, I knaw, for I be eighty year auld an' wears things against my skin to this day; gude charms I warn 'e, though the nature of 'em ban't for your ear, less you should laugh at me an' count me a silly auld mump-head.

You'm lookin' at that dead rose 'pon the mantelshelf under a li'l' glass shade. I thought you was. It have bided theer, between they two white cloam dogs, through winter an' summer for fifty year, an' 'tis more'n that since it budded and blawed. 'Twould fall to dust if you moved un; yet I'd not have it do so till I be put away; then the poor withered thing'll go under wi' me—back to the red airth us both springed from so long since. My childer smile at me—they'm fathers an' mothers now theerselves; an' theer childer laugh, for what lad or lass caan't teach theer gran'-mother to suck eggs nowadays? But theer

'tis yet—the ghostie of a li'l' red rose, an' so dear to me as the memory of the time when 'twas plucked, an' the dead wan as plucked it. An' a mystery, tu; for though theer ban't no magic in the story, yet it comed forth o' magic, if you understand me; 'twas a strange happening as could never have falled out but for my faith in hidden sayin's believed when I was a gal.

My maiden name was Bassett, Margaret Bassett, younger darter of Sexton Bassett—a man as digged more graves by all accounts than ever a sexton to Little Silver afore. They do say that Sexton Baker—the present man—doan't go so deep as my faither, but I wouldn't speak a word against the auld sawl, I'm sure; an', deep or shallow, us'll all lie wi'in earshot o' the Trump. Gude stock the Bassetts comed of, though they've sinked lower of late. But I held my head so high as them as had gone afore me when I was nineteen, being a bowerly, pink-an'-white maid, though I sez it, wi' hair black grape colour in the sun, darker'n a winter night in shadow. So Enoch was pleased to think. That was the Bible name

of un; an' t'other was Dawe. A undergardener him, up to Oakshotts when fust I knawed un—a man six foot tall, wi' a red skin an' sand-coloured hair, an' eyes so blue as lupins. The Little Silver gals laughed at un somewhat, why for I couldn't tell 'e, for he was a man of seemly outward parts, a clean liver, an' wan as stood to work. But his amazin' directness of speech made him 'pear differ'nt to other men. He talked little enough, but allus to the point. Weern't no more 'feared o' the naked truth than you o' that cat sleepin' 'pon the hearthstone. An' as he telled it in season an' out, he didn't have so many friends as he might. Silent by nature tu, an' short an' sharp in manner; but Squire Bewes, as was a plain-dealer hisself, found out the worth of un, an' said in company, as I heard through Tom Aggett, footman to Oakshotts, that Enoch Dawe was 'bout the awnly man ever he met that 'peared unequal to lyin'.

Though a under-gardener, even to Oakshotts, was a chap a long way under the point of my nose as I cocked it in them days, yet I grawed friends wi' Enoch—out

of curiosity fust, then from other reasons. I let un take me to a fairing wi' my sister Jane; an' I went up to Oakshotts, when the fam'ly was from home, to see the fine things he'd worked theer—'mazin' carpet-beddin' an' such-like furrin gardening, wi' man's thoughts all copied out in God's grawin' things. Butivul 'twas, for certain, an' cost a mint o' money, so Enoch said.

He never spawk soft—never so much as squeezed my hand. Words was allus hard wi' him; an', in his jonic way, if he'd said anything at all to me, 'twould have been the truth; an' he was feared to tell that. But I was wife-auld, an' a peart gal very interested in men-folk; an' I seed in the blue eyes of un all what he thought about me. They was so honest as his tongue, you see, an' couldn't hide the truth. For though a strong man may keep the bit 'pon his lips most times, he can't prevent his eyes from tellin' li'l' secrets here an' theer, not if they'm honest eyes, like Enoch's was.

I'll make haste now to a midsummer eve when the world weer fifty year younger, an' maids simpler in their ways, an' not 'shamed

of puttin' faith in fairy stories. Me an' my sister Jane it was; an' the moon in the sky, an' a blush o' pale light still broodin' awver the hidden road of the sun behind the high lands above Little Silver up Dartymoor way. Theer us stood at midsummer midnight in our li'l' garden o' flowers—sweet williams, lad's love, pinks, grannie's nightcaps, an' herbs for many uses. 'Twas a glitter o' dew below an' stars above; an' the valley silent save for an auld owl from Farmer Endicott's owl tree; an' the airth asleep; an' the distant cots, as climbs the hill theer far off, lookin' like white goblin men a-squat on the moor-side wi' theer eyes blinkin' in the moon an' theer thatches silver bright.

Us was theer, me an' Jane, 'pon a strange errand for sure, an' you may laugh if you'm pleased to; though theer's nought to laugh at so far as I can see. You must know that if a blindfolded maiden plucks a rose 'pon midsummer night at the bell-stroke of twelve o'clock, theer'll be found deep vartue in such a flower. So 'twas thought then; an' a wise woman—as be dead now an' wiser still, I doubt—had told me how such a blossom,

plucked at such a time, should be wrapped careful in white paper, an' hoarded away from the light, an' kept in a secret place till Christmas mornin'. An' then the maid as picked it would find her rose so fresh an' fair as 'twas six months afore. That is if she was to be a wife. Next, her was to set it on her bosom when she went forth; an' then 'twould prove a loadstone of power, an' draw—will he, nill he—the man as God had willed to be her master. 'Twould draw un to her against all fightin'; an' he would put out his hand an' take the rose from the gal; an' wi'in a year an' a day them two would be man and wife. Which things many folks believed most steadfast when I was nineteen.

That was our errand, then; an', no ways 'shamed, us stood theer in our nightgowns, wi' awnly the moon to see; an' Jane, her blinded my eyes wi' a handkercher, and I done the like for her. Then us turned about wance or twice, till in doubt wheer we was to, an' waited for the chimin' of the hour from the church. Presently it tolled out, an' 'pon the twelfth stroke, us put forth our

hands ; an' Jane laughed, for she met a bud straightway ; an' I hollered, for I pricked myself cruel an' touched nought but thorns. Yet I found a rose tu, though I smarted for it ; an' then us took the bandages off our eyes, an' went in the house, an' lighted a cannell, an' found as Jane had picked a white monthly rose, an' I'd got a red un. So we wrapped the flowers in silver paper an' stored 'em snugly away till Christmas. Half in jest, half in earnest, I reckon us was ; but Jane hoped least from her white rose, for she weren't much to see in the eyes of men. Awnly when a body comed to knaw her heart, the faace of her grawed into new meaning.

Time rolled along to autumn an' the fall of the leaf ; an' nothin' much happened 'cept Enoch Dawe 'peared more tongue-tied than ever when along wi' me. Not that I should have taken any gert count of that, for us had our lives afore us ; but I noticed that Jane an' him was grawin' a bit close tu. Her never lost a chance of sayin' a gude word for the man, an' what 'peared terrible coorious was that though when along with

me speech comed so hard with him that us would often walk a mile wi'out a word; yet, to Jane, he could talk so natural as a duck can swim. I grawed a bit dark in my mind, but I couldn't tell even then what I thought about it; much less can I now, arter all these years. Jane, I reckon, was the best woman the world's ever shawed me; yet, come winter, it set me shakin' to hear her praise of Enoch Dawe noon an' night. I weern't a comin'-on maid, but I'd grawed to love the man by then, an' very like theer'd have been bitter words between me an' Jane 'fore long. Awnly Christmas was a busy time, an' us didn't have much chance for quarrel.

'Pon Christmas Eve I was dog-tired, I mind, an' I went to sleep almost afore I'd got into bed. But 'twas as though I'd put a bit o' yarrow under my pillow, for I dreamed of Enoch Dawe that night—a gashly auld dream as shawed un to me confined. Through the lid I could see un, tap, tap, tapping, an' calling out to my faither to stir hissself an' dig a grave for un. I woke wi' a scream, an' theer was

a light in the chamber, an' Jane, who slept along wi' me, stood by my side an' axed what was amiss.

"I was stirring," she said, "an' you 'peared so onrestful an' wisht that I was gwaine to wake 'e when you waked yourself. What's wrong with 'e?"

"Nought," I answered her—"nought but a bad dream."

She shivered, for 'twas a cruel, cold, starved Christmas that 'year, an' blawed out the light an' comed into my bed for warmth. Then us was soon asleep again, an' I dreamed no more, gude or ill.

Come marnin', what should Jane do but rise up an' rummage in a auld desk of gran'mother's where she kept her trinkets an' treasures? But 'tweern't for some brooch or other adornment to brighten herself Christmas Day, for she took out from bottom of the desk her white rose; an' I seed her fingers shake a bit as she awpened the paper. But that might have been my fancy. Then she gived a low cry.

"Withered up!" she said, "withered to nought but dust, my poor li'l' white rose!"

“Sarves you right for such foolishness,” I told her, “an’ me tu, for I lay my red rose be so fady as your white wan. Ban’t no magic left in the world now,” I said, “because all the witches be dead this many a day, for sartain.”

To tell ’e plain truth, I’d most forgot all about the rosen, an’ mine might have bided to the bottom of my box till crack o’ doom for me; but now, seeing sister so set ’pon it an’ not sorry to show her I was no better off than she, I turned the changes out of my box, an’ theer, at the bottom, under a sprig or two of rosemary, as I’d put along with it, was the flower. I pulled un out, awpened the paper an’—my stars! Theer was my red rose, sweet as June, fresh an’ butivul to see, wi’ the very dew o’ night ’pon un, same as in the moony hour of bygone midsummer when I picked un!

I thought I was dreamin’ again till Jane spoke; but her words told me she seed the same as me.

“You’m wrong,” she said, keeping ’mazin’ quiet; “theer’s magic in the world yet.”

I took the rose to the dim marnin’ light,

an' found as it were living leaf an' petal,
stalk an' scent. A real blood-red rose;
an' biting frost 'pon all the airth, an' ice
inside our window-panes!

For a moment I was feared, an' scared
cruel. You see I minded the rest of the
auld tale, an' it looked an awful thing to
read the future by wearin' of un. A dark
thing it looked to me, I do assure 'e.
Weern't much better'n witchcraft, to my
frighted thinking, an' I most shivered when
I remembered that so sure as I went out
in the village wearin' of my rose, I should
meet the man ordained to marry me. An'
if no man comed an' took it, then I should
bide a maid. So I was for burnin' the
flower, though half in doubt as to what
might hap if I thraved un in the fire;
but Jane awverbore me an' spoke so strong
'pon it that I said as I'd do what she
bid.

"You caan't in reason go back now," she
told me. "My flower be dead, an' that
shaws theer ban't no lover for me, so I
must make shift to go on wi' my life alone;
but your red rose means a living, loving

man, I'll stake my life, an' 'twill be flyin' in the very faace o' Providence to set such a sign at nought. Wear the thing to church, come marnin' service; 'tis a charm for gude, not evil, I promise 'e."

So I gived way, an' set the rose in water till arter breaksis, an' then, in a flurry, went off wi' Jane, prinked out in Sunday clothes wi' the flower 'pon my breast—throbbing to my young heart's throb. Even now I flicker up when I think of it, an' my auld blood do come an' go faster from my cheek as I call home that Christmas. I was so full o' myself that I fancied the whole world was lookin' 'pon my rose, an' I shook like a leaf when any lad I knawed comed nigh me, an' turned away from the males as though they was Red Injins. A mizmaze I was in—a terrible coorious sensation—an' the smell o' the rose in church most made me scream out more'n wance. Yet theer 'twas, full an' fresh, sitting under my chin so calm an' sweet as any flower what ever blawed in proper season, 'stead of a heathen, bewitched thing as was picked six months afore an' did ought by rights to have been

dust an' ashes long since with all the other flowers of the flown summer.

An', comin' out o' church, I mind how Samson Chugg, the blacksmith, as was disposed to be soft wheer I was consarned, comes up an' gives me joy o' the day; an' I gathers myself to myself, as if the man had been a mouse or a beetle, an' I sez—

“You keep your distance, Samson Chugg!”

An' he graws beet-red, naturally enough, 'fore such an ondacent speech, an' sez, “All right, all right, Mistress Spitfire,” he sez. “I wasn't gwaine to kiss 'e onder a lich-gate,” he sez. “Doan't give yourself such damn silly airs,” he sez, “just 'cause Heaven's given 'e graces!”

People laughed, an' I could have cried—cried salt tears—to think of havin' made myself such a giglet afore all the bettermost folks of the parish. An' I couldn't see Jane nowheers, nor faither neither, so just set off back-along so fast as my legs would bear me. In a passion tu, to mind what a fule I'd shown myself.

Then, gwaine up the lane from the village

to wheer us lived in them days, I seed a long man in Sunday black leanin' awver a gate; an' my heart went up in my mouth, for 'twas Enoch Dawe. He turned; an' he seed the rose. I know he seed it, for 'twas shakin'; an' I grawed fainty like, an' everything swimmied round in my eyes.

"Merry Christmas to 'e, Margery," he sez; "an' a Happy New Year, an' plenty of 'em!"

"Thank you," I sez, my voice no bigger'n a hedge-sparrow's.

Then he made a sort o' sound, not speech—a gaspin' sort o' sound 'twas—an' put out a hand; an' my rose was gone.

"I must—I must do it, sweetheart!" I heard un say; then I comed awver queer, an' shut my eyes; an' I reckon as I'd have falled in the hedge if he hadn't seed I didn't. When I looked again, theer the man was wi' my red rose between his teeth, an' his faace matchin' the colour of it. He'd used both hands seemin'ly to hold me up, though wan would have done, seeing the huge strength of him.

"Doan't say no—doan't say no, Margery,

my dear woman," he begs of me. "I'll be a gude husband to 'e all the days o' my nat'ral life if you'll let me."

What could a poor, dazed gal do? An' I did love un, whether or no. But I just had sense to think of sister.

"'Tis Jane as you loves, I reckon, Enoch Dawe," I said.

An' he answered, all in wan piece—

"No, her loves you, not me. Us conspired together against 'e, for I bein' so slow of speech couldn't faace 'e; an' I tawld her how 'twas with me; an' her minded that midsummer night; an' 'twas her gude thought—solemn truth. She said as how you'd hoarded a red rose, an' shawed me the bush; an' I took a braave cutting of it by night, an' bore it up to Oakshotts, an' set it in a hot plaace under glass, an' tended it, same as I'd tend you, my dinky maid. An' the buds comed, for her forced butivul; an' the flowers was theer when I wanted 'em; an' yester-noon I cut a purty bud—this here wan—an' gived it to your sister. She done the rest, I see; for her promised me as you'd wear it this marnin', and bid me pluck

it from 'e, same as what I done. ' 'Twill make talk between 'e,' Jane said, 'an' loose your lips.' An' so it have seemin'ly; for, God's my judge, I never spoke so much to man or maid afore in all my life."

Then he waited, wi' a world o' fear on his faace, to see whether I'd taake it kind or hard. An', what wi' the upstore my heart was in, an' the prayer in the eyes of un, an' the gert body o' the man, an' the gude name he'd a-got, an' the thought of sister, as had worked so clever unbeknawnst to bring it all about—I took it kind.

THE MAIDEN BELL

'TIS the fashion, 'mongst them as doan't know an' won't larn, to say as nothing never happens here, an' that theer ban't a deed falled out worth talking of since Queen Victoria comed to the throne of England. But for my part, us 'pears to have so many signs an' wonders as any other plaace of like size. An' if 'tis awnly a bull broke loose, or a strange hoss in the pound—why, theer's matter for discoorse; for nought never chances wi'out somethin' behind it; an' awftentimes a small item will plum out into a far-reachin' thing, big enough to make a wonder from sowin' to reapin'.

What I be gwaine to tell 'e 'bout is the narration consarnin "Spider" Battishill, as was, 'pon all 'counts, the most coorious piece ever bred to Little Silver. Him an' me was

young men together, an' gude friends tu, for he never vexed me; but some couldn't onderstand him, for he didn't live by rule, an' had funny tricks, an' was a changeling, as a few didn't fear to say.

Spider's faither was village clerk in the "thirties," or thereabouts, an' he'd married a gal by name of Bluett, wan o' Widow Bluett's three darters—her as comed to live in Little Silver when her husband, a preventive officer, died to Daleham-by-the-Sea. An' Spider's faither married the eldest of 'em, an' had two sons—Matthew, as went for a soldier, an' never comed home again; an' William, so named after his gran'faither, the coastguardsman, but called by the bwoys "Spider," which name sticked to un through life. He'd got it from a creepy kindness he showed them insects, for he would moon about catching flies for the spiders, an' other queer antics, when he did ought to have been at his play with other childern.

An' he grawed up soft wheer all manner of life was consarned, an' was loth to shorten so much as the days of a hedge-flower by plucking it. He never made no enemies,

being a well-disposed chap, an' as he grawed up an' took to a thatcher's trade, every wan liked un, from parson to poacher Coaker—him as was shot onder the moon in the pheasant covers to Godleigh, poor sawl. An' even wi' him Spider would go out o' nights to see the ways of beasts an' birds ; an' though he didn't love Coaker's business, I assure 'e, yet theer was a fascination about that poacher, and Spider always told Coaker when the third of Daniel was 'read out in church ; because arter that chapter fall'd the time had come for woodcocks in the coombs and marshy places. But 'tis all a new ordinance, nowadays, an' third Daniel don't come 'pon the arrival of the woodcocks no more. An' when Coaker died 'twas his friend as tolled passing bell for un ; an' when us buried the man, after a very ondacent skirmish wi' Farmer Endicott, Spider it was as ringed his knell.

Which brings me to the point about Battishill. He had black, straight hair, wonnerful brown eyes like a retriever dog's, an' a leather-visaged countenance. Stood five foot ten or so, I should judge, an' was

slight built, though wiry with it. Full o' life, an' fond o' work, an' a gert hand at the thatching. Never seed a better. His work was sure to stand for fifty year. He knawed good reed from bad with his eyes shut; an' he had his awn opinion on spar-gads, as becomed a craftsman. For he held to willow rather than hazel, against all comers, an' would cut his awn osiers when he could.

But the life's passion of the man was bell-ringing—more'n that, his very sawl was wrapped up in one single bell. Us had so gude a ring o' bells to Little Silver as you might seek, for their size, on Darty-moor—sweet as herald angels, I do assure 'e, an' wi' a 'mazin' body o' sound tu. Been heard ten miles in a gale of wind, some said further. Anyway, 'twas tenor bell as Spider ringed. I stood up next to un in those days, bein' a tidy hand myself, an' never did I see a man drop an' set a big bell better. He'd touch the rope an' send his message to the bell-chamber, an' tenor bell—her 'peared to knaw un so well as if he was her very friend. He could draw the moosic of her magic like, an' at

such times the brown faace of the man glowed into a regular Moses' faace, an' theer was a shine in his eyes as never comed from the lantern.

That bell was recast by founder Wiseman—a gert bell hero—and it dated back into the auld days, parson awnly knawed how far. But 'twas two hunderd years auld, anyways; an' it had “Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in the firmament of His power” graven around the lip of it; an' 'twas a true maiden bell also, wan what had been cast to perfect pitch, an' never needed so much as a chip to the sound bow. A maiden bell, sure enough, wi' a perfect keynote—such a wan as, if you hits her on the curve up top, sounds eight notes higher'n the key; an' struck wan quarter down, rings a quint, as us calls it, which be a fifth; an' two quarters down, or lower, gives a third. Then, if you hits her wheer the clapper do, upon the rim, you get all them three notes a-ringing simultaneous in the butivul, glorious keynote—if I make myself onderstood. An' 'twas that fact as led Spider to say of his maiden bell that

'twas a Christian's masterpiece, 'cause theer you found three in wan an' wan in three—same as Faither, Son, an' Ghost—three Pussons an' one God.

Full of such items he was—half a jolt-head some thought; but them what knawed un better seed as his mind was built in a soarin' pattern. An' though he might be like to a man walkin' in his sleep now an' again, yet he done his work well an' honest, an' lived a worthy life, an' kept hisself an' his auld parents, an' saved a pound here an' theer tu; which be the whole New Testament in a nutshell, 'pears to me.

Then the common lot took Spider, as it must all that be built of human clay, an' he falled in love wi' a woman. Thirza Collins she was, as comed of auld-established denizens of these paarts—working woodmen, gamekeepers, an' such like. I never could care a curse 'bout the gal myself, my taste inclinin' to a dark-coloured sort; but he was a blackish man, an' took to a fair maid contrariwise—a gal wi' yellow hair an' April-blue eyes, as I'd not trust more'n

I'd trust April-blue skies myself, though wheerfore blue's apt to be oncertain an' grey's mostly jonic I never met the wise man as fathomed.

Battishill an' Thirza walked together for six months, or might have been more ; then question of fixin' the date was in the air when them twin men, Dave an' Jonathan Mudge, comed in to five hunderd pound apiece through theer mother's brother, who died at Plymouth, an' named 'em both in his will, him bein' a pastry-cook. Well, money's a power, an' when it runs into hunderds it takes a woman, as knaws the value of it, all her strength to set faace against it. Coorse Thirza was knawed to be tokened, an' Dave Mudge, though he'd offered an' been refused by the gal afore Spider comed along, was last chap in Little Silver to do a mean trick or try an' sloak her away from a man as she'd promised to wed, whether he loved her still or not. But the wickedness beganened on t'other side, an' Thirza Collins, knawin' as Dave Mudge now numbered nearly so many hunderds as her man could count tens, an' reckoning

as Dave hadn't chaanged his high opinion of her, hatched out a cruel, cunning plot against Spider; an' her mother, as weern't no better'n she, helped her. 'Twas this way the minx done it: she gradually dropped off from Battishill inch by inch, an' tried to make it look to the parish as if 'twas his fault, not hers.

You might say as no such thing could be done in broad daylight, and for my part I'd never have believed if I hadn't seen; but done it was—by the help of the devil hisself, I reckon. Thirza trumped up a parcel o' lies an' follies—said as how Spider weern't on-coming enough, wouldn't let her name the day, blawed hot an' cold, was a dreamer, 'peared better pleased at ringing tenor bell than walkin' out wi' she, an' such-like nonsense. An' more'n wance she went about to meet Dave Mudge in lonely lanes an' by out-the-way stiles. Always cryin', tu, when he passed by, for a wicked gift o' tears that maid had; an' Dave, as was a fiery, flaxen-polled man wi'out much sense in his head, took her paart, an' felt as she was being badly treated by wan as

didn't knaw his luck now he'd got her. Then Dave began to open his mouth about the matter, an' said things—to Applebird, keeper of the Green Man Inn, an' a gude few other neighbours—as had best been left not spoke.

It grawed into common talk presently; but Spider—as hadn't got no womankind to catch wind of it for un, his mother being a bed-lier—was, of coorse, the very last man to hear tell of the trouble. Awnly he knawed Thirza was grawin' chilly-like, an' he tawld me 'bout it, an' let out the secret to my faace wi' the innocence of a baaby, not guessin' how much more theer was in his speech than the words of it.

I was talkin', an I said—

“Theer's nought makes a happy marriage like gude health both sides. A man's a damn fule,” I sez, “to mate wi' a weakly female; an' a woman's equal soft to marry any chap as be naish. Give me fair share of fat on a woman an' muscle on a man,” I tells Spider; “an' let both parties pray for a gude appetite, an' gude teeth behind it, so's the stomach, as be a vital member, doan't

have to do no more'n his proper share o' work."

An' Battishill owned to my wisdom, an' made haste to say—

"Thirza's so plump an' sweet as a ripe apple, I'm sure; an' her butivul teeth be a casket o' pearls set in ruby"—such was his fansical way o' talkin'—"for many an' many a time have I seen the low, setting sunlight a-shinin' in her li'l' red mouth when she've yawned."

Theer 'twas! What business had thicky gal to be yawnin' wi' Spider's arm around her, no doubt, an' his voice a-tellin' all love's fulishness in the ear of her? Yet—them was his awn words—many an' many a time he'd seen her yawn.

I wasn't so much surprised arter that when the crash comed. He never heard nothin', an' went on livin' in a fule's paradise till, wan day, t'other man was stinged into a bold deed by some lie of the gal's; an' he went to Spider an' axed if 'twas true, an' said how, if 'twas, as he'd got more to tell on the subject. Battishill just looked at Dave Mudge, in his dreamy-fashioned way, an' wanted to

knew who'd told un any such thing ; but Dave wouldn't let on, so Spider drawed hisself up, proud-like, an' said, so scornful as a peacock, that he was above answerin' rumours as a man couldn't put a tongue to. Then in a passion—not being a very well-eggicated man—Dave let the cat out of the bag, an' said if Spider must know, 'twas his sweetheart's self had said it.

Upon that, as Dave told me arter, t'other turned storm-colour, then so pale as his brown skin would let un ; an' he just said—

“ If she told you, Dave Mudge, 'tis true.”

But such was the desperate look of the man, that Mudge couldn't find words to say no more, an' slinked off, an' left un wi' the iron entering into his sawl.

What happened between Spider an' the gal arter, none can rightly say, though I lay it kept her awake a night or two thinking 'pon it ; but, anyways, when he gived her her choice to be off with un, she jumped at it, an' the match falled through.

I s'pose the depths of un was stirred, an' maybe something broke in him for all us could say, but never to mortal man did he

drop a breath 'bout Thirza, an' he kept his chin up an' looked folks in the faace. Yet theer 'twas feedin' on his life like a poison an' lookin' out of his eyes like a fire if you caught 'em sudden. An' he grawed so shy as a raven tu.

I doubt he'd have left Little Silver but for his auld folks an' his maiden bell—awnly sort of maiden ever he seemed like to have now. But from the bell he couldn't paart; an' though 'twas rumoured he didn't stand to his work so close as formerly, an' didn't care no more whether his spar-gads was willow or hazel, yet he was always in the belfry twice Sundays, an' never missed a passing bell, an' took his plaace regular at all times of rejoicin' or junketings as called for the ringers.

Now an' again some whispered as he 'peared a bit mazed, for he'd get up in the bell-chamber an' sit along wi' tenor bell, an' dust her, an' polish up the Bible saying graved upon her. Wan might a'most have thought as the poor chap was trying for to see if the bell could take the plaace of the gal; but naturally it couldn't. 'Twas quite beyond his power, worse luck, to shake

Thirza Collins out of his brain, an' like many afore his time an' since, he pined an' mourned for what weern't worth the rags an' tags she was dressed in.

Ess fay! A bad gal, I warn 'e, wi' a gert love of trumpery adornment an' a heart so small an' so cold as a frog's, but hard with it—a heart as wouldn't melt in hell-fire—so Dave Mudge said after he'd been married to her less than a year.

But that's taking the tale tu fast, though 'twill tell you as the woman had her way. In fact she brought the new man up to the mark an' wonned un wi'in a month of giving Spider the go-by. They walked together for a matter of six weeks or so ; then Dave married her.

Folks was more sorry for Battishill than he was for hisself, you might have said, but that was the well-deep way of the man to seem to care nought. To the general eye he took it same as all of us takes the thick an' the thin o' life in these paarts. Us goes our way an', for myself, I assure 'e, I never allow no fortune, ill or good, to put me out of bias with things in general. Drink have done it in my

youth, now an' again—as it may overtake any young chap—but never sorrow nor yet joy.

So, because Spider took his physic wi'out makin' a faace over it, folks thought he weern't so very hard hit, an' misjudged him, though, mind you, a many of 'em would have hid theer inner selves just the same if the thing had fallen to theer share. An' so none didn't waste no pity 'pon un, but just said, in his hearin', in a kindly way, as theer was so gude feesh in the sea as ever comed out of it, an' such-like comforting general principles.

He went his dark road ; an' then Dave an' Thirza was axed out, an' not an eyelash of the man shook at the time, for I stealed a glance awver at un in church at the speakin' of the words. More'n that, he was friends wi' Dave after, an' 'twas even said that, when he met the gal by chance, here or theer, he'd give her "gude-day," like any other neighbour. But who could tell the grinding load hid in un, an' the sleepless nights, an' the black despair as the mind of un was stugged in, like a beast stugged in a bog ?

The weddin' comed, an' Spider, if you'll believe it, was at his post, though more'n

wan chap from Chagford an' Throwley offered to ring for un on that day—knawin' the story. But he said as tenor bell weern't gwaine to be touched by none but him so long as he could drop an' set her.

"I promised the woman," he told me, confidential, an' lookin' awful queer as he said it—"I promised Thirza Collins as, come wet or shine, I'd ring just a touch or two at her weddin' for luck, an' for love of her an' the bell. That was when I counted to be groom. But my promise holds, I reckon, though hers didn't." He smiled, wi' a far-away faace on un, an' ringed wi' the rest. Never ringed better neither, as all said. Bell an' him was body an' sawl, as you might say.

A purty weddin'—late autumn it falled, an' a butivul day, an' Dave's twin, Jonathan, was terrible down in the mouth 'cause he couldn't go along with 'em 'pon the honeymoon; for he'd never been separated from his brother eight-an'-forty hour since they weer born. An' us gived 'em a gude send-off, though wan auld shoe, thrawed for luck, did, by ill chance, hit the gal rather hard

between her shoulders. Anyway, off they went for a week to Plymouth, an' the bells ringed joyous through best part of the afternoon, an' most of us, 'cept Battishill, dropped in to Mrs. Collins's cottage that evening an' had a bite an' sup—though nothing to remember.

An' 'bout two months later falled the tag-end of the history, so sudden as a gunshot. Me an' Sexton Baker was the two in it—us an' him.

I'd called in to Baker's wan fine night towards Christmas—a Saturday 'twas, an' crystal-clear wi' an auld moon in the new moon's arms. Five o'clock it might have been, all so still as death out o' doors, an' the peat in Baker's fire tellin' frost.

Us dranked a drop of sloe gin, I mind; and I was sayin' as 'twas a record year at Little Silver in the matter o' deaths, an' not like to be another, so far as mortal could say, 'fore the new year, when, right on my word, tolled out the passing bell! 'tis always a wisht sound an' a sorry, but comin' in as it did then, loud an' deep upon my speech, it made me jump.

"I'm out, seemin'ly," I sez to Baker. "Theer's some poor sawl as you'll have to dig for come to-morrow, frost or no frost."

But then I see the sexton's eyes glazing in admiration.

"Fegs!" he sez, "what be that? Did 'e hear a bell?"

"'Tis passing bell," I answers him.

"Never!" he sez. "I was to church not ten minutes afore you comed, to light the stove against to-morrow, 'cause last Sunday Captain Yeoland told Parson as the heat-measure in his pew shawed little above freezin', an' said as he weern't gwaine to be froze alive not even in the House of God for the sake of two penn'orth o' coke. Them weer his words. An' I locked up all when I left, meaning to drop in again last thing. 'Tis magic, I do b'lieve, for not a body in the plaace is sick or sorry to my knowledge."

"Tenor bell tu," I sez. "I lay Spider'll hear it. No man or ghost have touched that bell save him for five year."

Well, Baker had his keys off the nail

an' his hat on his head quicker'n I can say the word ; an' I lighted his lantern, an' us started brisk for the church, as weern't above a quarter-mile away from the cottage.

A few women was to theer doors axing who 'twas for, which showed as the bell weern't ringing in our ears awnly. Then it stopped sudden, an' the last note died slow, an' the gert silence arter was almost more fearsome than the sound of it. Baker 'peared a bit shy of gwaine on, but I forced un forward, an' presently he opened the church an' us went to the belfry, me leadin'.

But we'd comed tu late, despite our haste, for theer was a man hanging from the rope of the maiden bell. He'd climbed up the ladder to the bell-chamber, made fast, an' then cast hisself off. I wouldn't swear he was dead when us got un down, but he was 'fore doctor comed—dead as a hammer.

'Twas Battishill hisself as had ringed his awn knell, then made an end by his awn hand. But why he'd chose that particular time, so long arter the woman was married, none could say. They brought it in un-sound mind—to save hurtin' people's feelings,

I reckon—an', come Christmas, we all wore a bit of black for un in the belfry, an' put a new rope to the maiden bell 'fore 'twas ringed again. Somehow I missed the auld sweetness after, though it might have been fancy.

RIGHT OF WAY

'T WAS Gregory Neck, his thought; an' us said ditto to un when he voiced the desperate deed, bein' all a bit drunk, I reckon, awin' to the death of neighbour Coaker.

But fust I must tell you how a footpath runned down south side of the Barton field, as 'twas called—a gert ten-acre piece belonging to Bear Down Farm, an' lying 'pon the hill-slope betwixt the church and Bear Down aforesaid. The path was partickler useful to folk from the hill cots, an' Farmer Endicott let wan or two here an' theer employ it in theer goings an' comings; but he was not friendly to most, an' took gude care to let it be knawn as he awnly suffered a man or woman to pass

along it out o' kindness now an' again. Theer weern't no right of way by no means—so said Endicott—but others held out 'twas a public path; an' the auld men always said the same, so it remained a vexed question, an' the point slumbered till the matter of Saul Coaker, as I be gwaine to tell 'e 'bout.

He was comin' up-long to his cottage, what lay 'pon the Moor edge at Sorrow Corner, above Bear Down, wan October marnin' just arter daybreak, when who should meet him from the Barton but Ned Loveys, as was head man to Farmer Endicott in them days. He weer a strong, stuggy, snarly chap, never very willin' to listen to another's reasons, an' he bid Saul go back—ordered un off like a dog. So they falled into a bit of a scrimmage, an' poor Saul got worsted.

You see, Saul Coaker had his little weakness, like the best of us; an' wan of 'em was Squire Yeoland's woods; an' he told me, an' Samson Biddlecombe, an' Gregory Neck, an' another gude friend or two, that he was much hindered in his li'l' job wi'

Ned Loveys by reason of havin' two pheasants in the linin' of his jacket an' three gert rabbits tied around un with a bootlace onder his shirt. "But," he sez, "God's my judge, I'll not rest theer. 'Tis a right of way—honest an' open—as my faither said afore me, an' if 'tis in my power to get it back for the neighbours I'll do it yet. An', whether or no, I'll have it out wi' that crooked-visaged swine, Ned Loveys, as I could thrash wi' wan arm tied behind me."

All for open-handed justice an' plain dealin' he was, poor Coaker; an' the big heart of un soared above mean things like game laws, an' "trespassers will be persecuted," an' other such-like vanities; but the body of un wasn't bullet-proof more'n any common man's, so he comed untimely to his close. Though I shall always hold steadfast, that if he'd bin born to a higher callin' in life than a stonemason's—an' mostly out o' work at that,—as he'd have cut a braave dash in history, for he was an onusual man.

But as it was, an' two short weeks arter his fuss in the Barton wi' Loveys, gormed

if Saul didn't go out of it in a most tragical manner. 'Twas a heavy game year, you see, along o' the fine, dry spring; an' as luck would have it, Squire Yeoland kept away nearly all autumn—courtin' a Lunnon woman, 'twas surmised—an' so, little or no shootin' was done at Godleigh Park till arter Christmas. Which Coaker, in his spacious way, reckoned a pity; an' he made up a li'l' moonlight party for the covers, an' him an' four more done a raid.

I doan't need to tell 'e 'bout that; but anyways 'twas winded by a woman as owed Coaker's wife a grudge. An' Saul—poor blid—he caught a tartar. Theer was firin' when the keeper's chaps comed to close quarters, and a onder-keeper lost his arm by it; an' Coaker got hit cruel hard in the lower quarters, an' crawled home-along to die; an' t'others runned away, but was caught arter. An' when 'squire got word as Coaker was dyin', the gen'leman, very kind an' generous-like, let un bide to home an' make a peaceful end in his awn cottage, wi' Betty, his wife, to comfort the last hours of un.

Three days he lingered, then out he went, an' arterwards Betty, as was Irish, an' called Connor afore she married, willed as theer should be respect paid an' gived a party the night afore Saul was buried. An' she axed just a few of us, as had been the man's best friends, to drop in an' pay our mournful dooty in the Irish way ; which we done very willingly.

Coaker weern't never handsome, awin' to his havin' but wan eye ; an' his ears was 'mazin' cumbrous, bein' more like rashers o' thick bacon than human ear-pieces ; an' dead the man 'peared at his very worst—so solemn an' grim as a waxwork of Judas what I'd seen to a fair. An' neither me, nor Greg Neck, nor Samson Biddlecombe, nor "Spider" Battishill could touch bit or sup till us had done the last for un an' sadly screwed the lid 'pon his clay.

Mrs. Coaker—sister by marriage to her as mothered poor Soft Sam in earlier years—was very perfuse wi' the liquor, an' I seem the poor sorrow-stricken sawl must have been weepin' pure whisky afore the sittin' rose ; but theer was gude sense in her to

the last, an' the things she said against principalities an' powers, an' them in high places in general, fairly made my flaish creep. An' Gregory had a tender eye to her, as us very well knawed, bein' a widow-man wi'out childer; an' he was pitched in the next chair to her, an' held her hand onder the table.

For my part I singed a mournful stave or two, proper to the sad event; an' so did Biddlecombe; an' then us fell to talkin' 'bout the gude points of the deceased—which didn't take long—an' then Samson, as was getting thick in his speech, suddenly minded Endicott's Farm, as Bear Down was called most times, an' the right of way.

You see, Coaker's cottage layed right up the coomb, above Bear Down, beneath the very brow o' Scor Hill—in such a dark, awverhung corner, under a bit of a gravel pit, that the sun 'peared to desert the plaace, winter-time, an' the dewes o' September never dried till frost comed an' froze 'em. An' the nighest way to Little Silver an' the burying-ground was across Barton field—as Spider Battishill pointed out.

"That's the bee-line," he said; "then awver the stile an' down past Sexton's house, an' you'm theer."

Widow Coaker, as had grawed in a fightin' temper by now, flamed up at mention of Bear Down Farm, an' wished, by the Mother o' God, as her man had been spared to keep his promise touchin' Ned Loveys. An' Gregory Neck, to please her, took that matter on his awn shoulders an' promised, in a very valiant fashion, as he'd dress down Loveys if ever chance offered. An' then Spider changed the subject an' said—

"When I think how poor dear Saul theer weighed more'n twelve stone in life, an' that, wi' the casket an' what not, the corpse of un will run to more'n fifteen stone all told to-morrow, I could a'most find it in my heart to rejoice as I ban't 'mong the bearers. But I shall think kindly of 'e all sweatin' come the marnin', as I toll the bell for un." For, of course, 'twas to be a walkin' funeral.

"Pity for sartain us caan't go by Endicott's field," I said, "'twould knock off more'n half a mile."

“An’ why for shouldn’t us?” axed Samson. Every man Jack amongst us sat wi’ his mouth awpen at this gert thought; an’ Gregory, who had his bit o’ larning along wi’ the best, pursued the matter.

“‘Twould be a mighty deed everyways,” he said, “an’ mightier than you chaps think for. More’n the mere savin’ of a few yards for our legs, because any road what a cadaver have been carried or drawn awver, do become a public highway ever arter till the Trump o’ Doom by law appointed!”

That was his nice way of settin’ out the case; an’ he went on to assure the comp’ny, that wance we had borne the bones of Saul across that field, as he’d trudged awver night time so many an’ many a time in life, that the deed was done past all undoing.

“So he’ll have carried out the very act he was so set ’pon,” concluded Gregory. “Them’s my ideas, an’ let’s hear tell who’ve got better.”

Us all hammered ’pon the table till the three cannels shook in theer frames; an’ then Greg, whose feelin’s towards Mrs. Coaker made un more delicate than us,

axed what she'd got to say 'pon it. Poor sawl—her was much awvertaxed wi' grief an' could hardly speak plain, seemin'ly ; but her made sounds as might 'a' bin Irish sounds very like, an' then gived us to onderstand she thinked very well of the plan.

“'Twill be named Saul Coaker's Road ever after, for sartain,” said Spider, as was a speculative man.

“Ess fay!” I said, “an' come to think of it, 'tis the very fashion of deed poor dear Saul would have took delight in—defying of the moneyed classes. His spirit was always in arms against 'em—he hated all manner of authority from Duchy downward.”

“The identical word of Sexton Baker essterday!” cried out Samson. “I watched un diggin' of Saul's grave, an' had a tell wi' un ; an' he said, ‘Last time I seed the man’—meaning Coaker—‘us falled out sharply an' had high words, 'cause I'd found two traps what he'd teeled in the churchyard hedge, an' I drawed 'em, holdin' it to be a sacrilegious act. An' he swore

as he'd be upsides wi' me 'fore Christmas comed, yet here be I diggin' his graave. A fansical world ; but a pushin' man Coaker was, an' very stiff-necked against the law.' So said Baker."

We left it at that, an' finished up the party, an' drinked all theer was to drink just afore cock-light. Then every man went to his awn house to get his faace in some soap an' watter, an' shave his chin, an' put on his black against the funeral.

Us all agreed, gwaine down-long, that 'twas as purty a way to show respect to a comrade like Coaker as us had heard tell 'bout anywheers. Eight bearers theer was to be, an' questions rose whether t'others, besides me an' Neck an' Biddlecombe, would be of our mind 'bout the Barton pathway. Two chaps was the ondertaker's men comin' from Chagford, an' that left three from Little Silver—Lawrence, an' Dave an' Jonathan Mudge, twins, an' nephews of the famous Timothy Mudge, blacksmith. Them three would be our way for sartain, an' the village would be behind our elbows ; for Endicott weern't no favourite,

bein' tu given to pride hissself on his havage an' the number of his forbears as was stuffed in the churchyard, not to name the constant trouble 'bout the right of way.

Parson Smedley was to meet the procession by the lich-gate sharp at eleven o'clock; but very few else knawed 'bout the funeral. Awnly when ondertaker heard tell of our purpose he took Endicott's side, an' wouldn't give the light of his countenance; so we plainly told un to go to the dowl; an' he said harm would come of it, an' trapsed off wi' his two men. But us was six strong chaps, an' the road weer all down hill; so we up wi' Coaker, 'bout half-past ten o' the clock, an' started for the funeral. Mourners theer was awnly three—Betty, as walked behind the coffin, an' her two li'l gals, wan each side of her.

We tramped off so clever as could be; but us had got to chaange hands awftener than ever we'd thought to, for Saul proved a terrible lump, 'specially arter the mournful night we'd spent wi' the liquor. 'Twas awnly his gert passion for widow as kep' Gregory Neck to the work, an' the stiff collar of un

crumpled to a rag onder my eyes, an' mine weern't no better, an' my shoulder-joint was stiff for weeks arter; an' Dave Mudge dated his rheumatism in the left knee from the selfsame occasion.

But us kept our way, an' we'd got a braave bit awver the Barton footpath—almost to the leat, a stream that winds round the hill theer, an' fetches sweet water to Little Silver from the Moor—when, suddenly, us seed determined men ahead, an' bent 'pon mischief so far as we was consarned.

Theer stood Farmer Endicott hisself, so grim as a ghost, an' Loveys along wi' un, an' auld Churdles Ash—though he was tu aged to give or take blows—an' the ondertaker, an' lastly, Timothy Mudge, the blacksmith, a terrible strong piece, an' gude for any two of us, as we very well knawed.

"'Tis a bad look-out for our best clothes," said Lawrence, an' gived a sniff.

"We'm six to three, however," said Biddlecombe, "for Ash and the ondertaker don't count."

"Go on, if you're men," cried Mrs.

Coaker. "Sure an' you know what my dear husband would say to them devils!"

We had characters to lose, no doubt; but theer was our dooty to the dead man, an' our dooty to Little Silver likewise. So we heaved Saul shoulder-high an' kept our way.

Theer was awnly a few boards thraved 'cross the Leat, as Farmer an' his lot stood between us an' them.

"Back you go, my bold heroes," sez Endicott; "you'm all doin' wrong, an' you knaw it very well."

"'Tis a funeral," I shouts out, "an' we'm carryin' a holy corpse, an' theer's a sorrowin' wife an' childer followin' arter."

"And I don't go back for you, or any other man, so now then," said Mrs. Coaker.

On we tramped, an' 'twas a difficult case for them against us, for to stop a dead man be ill fortune for a year an' a day. I could see as Loveys an' auld Ash was a bit gallied, or, as you'd say, frightened 'bout it; but they stood shoulder to shoulder wi' Mudge, an' didn't mean to let us pass nohow.

"Bide together," said Biddlecombe onder his breath, "an' don't nobody leave hold of Coaker. He'll see us through this coil, though he be a dead man. An' when I sez 'Run!' mind the lot of 'e do it!"

Then us marked his deep drift, an' walked steadily till wi'in ten yards o' Mudge an' Endicott.

"Run!" roars out Samson Biddlecombe; an' us done it, an' the stratagem fairly foxed 'em, 'cause you can't well fight a ellum coffin if 'tis comin' for 'e like a battering-ram. But so 'twas, an' Coaker, he went head fust for Timothy Mudge, just for all the world as he would have done if he'd been alive, dear sawl. An' what could any chaps do against un? If it had been Goliath o' Gath the man must have gone down, 'cause theer was the six of us full tilt, an' Coaker's fifteen stone flyin' through the air wi' a power behind it as would have shook a church, let alone a blacksmith. Anyway, Mudge he went down in time to escape Coaker, but as he falled, he caught Gregory Neck by the leg an' hanged on to un like a gorilla, so us lost Neck; an'

Endicott seized hold o' Lawrence, an' they rolled awver an' awver 'pon the green together. Loveys, he went for me, but I steadied un wi' a whisterpoop 'pon the ear, havin' my right hand free, an' us four staggered awver the water, an' Mrs. Coaker screeched hell fire against Endicott, an' walked slap through the stream, as took her to the knees. Not that she wetted nothin' to signify, 'cause she held her new black out of the way, an' her gals done likewise.

Us made for the stile bottom of the meadow, an' just got to un, when Tim Mudge was on us again, an' Loveys tu. They'd have stopped us even then, for we was all four beat men wi'out a kick left in us; but Mrs. Coaker—valiant sawl!—she harried 'em like a hawk, an' showered saints an' devils out of her religion at 'em, an' flinged her pusson between us an' them, till at last blacksmith he picked her off the ground, fightin' like a cat-a-mountain, an' carried her along, all ends up, onder his arm, such was the huge power o' the man. But she'd done the trick, for by time they

was to us, an' while Dave an' his brother had dropped theer end of the coffin an' was dressin' down Loveys, me an' Biddlecombe, wi' a last gasp, so to say, tilted poor Coaker 'pon end, then let un slip, gently an' so solemnly as was possible at a time like that, awver the stile into the high road.

So the deed was accomplished, an' theer weern't no more left to do 'cept to blaze abroad how Barton path was a highway for evermore.

"You'll suffer for these here May games," Endicott sez; but we'd got our way at cost of nought beyond bruises; so we kept our mouths shut 'pon it an' dusted each other down an' tidied up the funeral, while Mrs. Coaker talked triumphant in a general way.

Bell begannd tollin' then, soft an' butivul as a dream bell, for some lads had runned forrard to tell Spider Battishill we was on hand. An' Betty, when she heard it, stopped talkin', an' fetched out her hankicher, an' begannd to weep that sudden an' perfuse as if you'd turned a tap in her.

All Little Silver was to doors an' winders by that time; an' we falled in step again so orderly an' decent an' solemn as any funeral could wish to be. Blacksmith an' Loveys was a chitterin' behind the chief mourners somewheers, an' ondertaker tu; but I do think as he felt joyful in his heart to remember how his workmanship had mown down such a mighty man as Mudge. Leastways 'twould have if he hadn't ducked for it. An' Lawrence comed back to his handle just at the finish onder the lighgate, an' whispered as well as he could for panting an' a bloody nose, as Farmer Endicott was gwaine to have the full majesty of the law against us, if it cost him a year's hay.

"Law's law," I said back to the man. "He may do his worst, but he can't alter what we've done more'n he can alter last week's weather. Us have borne Saul Coaker awver the Barton, an' theer's right o' way henceforth till the Trump."

Then we buried our poor neighbour, an' I mind how the "deads" or heavy clay which the yard was made of falled in gert

lumps at the appointed time, so 'twas more "airth to airth" than "dust to dust" in the holy phrase.

Widow let her grief have the bit. Her carried on sore, though theer was a gude woman or two at the graaveside on whose bosom her laid her head. An' Gregory Neck longed to soothe her, but the right feeling in the man told un as this weern't just the time for his comfort. So he bided along with us. An' arterwards some folks drove Betty an' her faitherless li'l' maids home in Mr. Applebird's auld carriage knawn as a "Victoria," after the Queen's Majesty I reckon, what Applebird had bought of Mr. Mason to Throwley, awin' to its bein' a bit shook in a accident. An' come fulness o' time, the woman put up a brave Delabole slate, wi' verses an' the name an' year an' day; an' 'tweern't till six months or more after the airth had rattled that she turned to Gregory Neck. Then he took her.

But the terrible coorious thing was that, despite our bowldacious deeds an' his far-reaching threats, Farmer Endicott never had the law of us arter all! An' when folk

set to work to walk on the path as us an' Coaker had thrawed awpen to all the world, be gormed if Farmer Endicott didn't carry on just the same as if theer'd never been no corpse awver his land at all! An' when us made common cause an' inquired of Lawyer Forde to Newton Abbot, us found as the Law be chaanged, an' a funeral doan't make a highway no more.

Which shows how manners an' customs be dyin' out; though for my part, 'tis very onsettlin' when the Law's self do waver; for who can set his foot steadfast in this vale wi' no unchanging warrant for his deeds behind un? 'Tis a parlous matter, an' if the Law goes, then, so like as not, the Prophets 'll go tu. An' wheer shall us be then?

ANOTHER LITTLE HEATH- HOUND

I'VE looked out 'pon the passing of near a century with these eyes, yet I can still find a laugh here and there, despite my aches an' pains, an' my grey-headed childern, an' another grandchild comin' next month, if God wills. 'Tis the ways of larnin' as mostly makes me smile behind my wrinkles now—to see country-bred an' town-bred each holdin' up the others in such high contempt. Townsfolk, I will say, do give themselves the most airs, for what they doan't know ban't worth knawin', by their own account; an' that's to say how all our larning of the soil be nought. Yet there's a gude few dark an' hidden corners in our lives 'pon Dartymoor, a wisht old place full o' history — lonesome, lightning-blasted, so

horrible as the wilderness wheer our Saviour kep' from meat an' drink for forty days. Ess fay! an' just so much the headquarters of the devil as ever thicky Scripture spot was. But tell townsfolk that; give 'em a peep at the truth, as was common knowledge to our faithers, an' they laugh at 'e. They credit the gulping, chatterin' bogs, an' the tors, an' the grey rings o' holy stones, because theer eyes have seed 'em; but tell of the gude few braave men as have lost theer lives by ways unknowen, whose bones lie hid till Doom; tell of the pixies an' the darker spirits that was gived power against humans, then you'm flouted for your pains. Name the Black Dog, the witch hare, the evil hid in River of Dart, an' such-like, an' they'll laugh an' tell 'e you'm outstayin' your time.

Who b'lieve in the heath-hounds now? Who hold wi' me that they hunt by day an' night, through the black winter, an' under the sunrises o' summer marnin's? Yet my awn husband 'twas as not awnly heard, but seed wi' his eyes. An' he haven't been dead above twenty year.

84 ANOTHER HEATH-HOUND

Night-foundered the man was, up Ray-borrow Pool way under Cosdon Beacon, after a light snaw, as comed sudden an' mazed him, as it will even the auldest moor-men, by changing of landmarks with its magic. Just a faint, far-off tinkle o' sound fust he heard, no sharper'n the wind in the dead heath ; then it swelled an' gathered like to ringing of bells ; an' then grawed louder an' sweeter, an' rose an' fell, an' changed into the full bay of little fairy hounds 'pon a scent. Like harp moosic, my dear man said —moosic played 'midst the fleece o' the high clouds wheer they shredded away pearly-like, an' the moon swimmied out upon the silver of the fallen snaw, to shaw things all huddled together an' changed an' shrinked small 'pon the eye —as snaw will do. Butivul to hear was the li'l' hounds givin' tongue ; an', knawin' well wheer he stood, my man felt a prayer to God bubblin' up in his heart. An' maybe 'twas well he felt it, for the thing them heath-hounds hunt swept past un like a breath from a awpen furnace door. Red-hot eyes to un, an' a sound same as a sobbin' bellows in his throat, an' a

ribbon of hell-fire for a tongue. But us may not speak of that, an' my husband wouldn't tell even me the shape of it, though I worritted un to do so, both in season an' out, God forgive me. An' after comed the li'l dogs—scores 'pon scores, doin' the will of theer Maker an' workin' out theer awn salvation by harryin' an' huntin' the Evil Wan awver Dartymoor till Eternity. Catch un they caan't, seemin'ly; but maybe they keep un out of mischief here an' theer, an' head un off now an' again, when he makes for the villages. My man seed 'em that night—a gert pack workin' like wan dog, wi' theer noses to the scent. Then, like moonbeams, all the hounds was gone, an' awnly the snaw rolled out awver hills an' vales, an' the cry of 'em died into a lonely echo out 'pon the night among the tors, like the murmur of waters afar off. He went, then, to see the sign of 'em, but not a paw-mark could he find, for the snaw was so soft an' suent as when it falled out the sky. An' Jim died four year later—though no more'n sixty-nine at the time he seed 'em; for 'tis

86 ANOTHER HEATH-HOUND

whispered as no man lives very long arter he's met the heath-hounds.

Yet what they small, busy dogs be, who truly knows? They'm forgot, like many another dark way of God wi' his spirits; they'm clean forgot out of mind, an' awnly theer Maker, an' a few other auld, wise folks—same as me—believes in these things, an' knaws 'bout 'em, an' keeps 'em hid in our hearts. 'Tis easier far for me to b'lieve in 'em than in such bowldacious, newfangled fulishness as I hear tell about every day. Speech of people miles apart through strings, an' railways as goes faster'n birds, an' such-like vain talk, I doan't feel called 'pon to credit, an' I'd like to see him as would make me; but the little heath-hounds—ban't theer a human sawl of my awn blood among 'em? An' be I gwaine to doubt what my awn heart tells me is gospel truth?

Theer's a story to it, an' if I've beginned backsy fust, you must let a auld woman tell her tale how she will.

'Twas my awn sister—Mary Applebird—so you'll judge none could knaw more of the innermost truth than what I do. Me an' her

was the darters of Gregory Applebird, who kepted the Green Man Inn to Little Silver. My younger brother keeps it now, an' he's well spawken after, though not the man his faither was by a long flight, I assure 'e.

As to the plaace, 'tis just same as it was—a grey stone house wi' the granite white-washed awver an' the slate roof tar-pitched. An' above the door there stands a iron to stick a oil lamp in winter nights, an' higher still was a auld signboard, whose creakin' an' groanin' in the windy weather I'll never forget. That have gone long years now, but 'twas a fine an' bold sign—a braave chap in a green coat wi' a red faace an' a gert gun 'pon his shoulder; an' Charlie Strickland 'twas as painted un.

You see, faither couldn't abide as any man should best him in his awn way of life, an' when Benjamin Biddlecombe, as kept the “Red Heifer” to Moreton, had a chap from Newton to paint a huge signboard for un, nothin' would please my faither but to have the like or better. An' Strickland, bein' a Chaggyford man, faither ordained, in a bad hour, as he should do the job; an' agreed

88 ANOTHER HEATH-HOUND

wi' him for a picksher painted on wood—ten shillings the price, if all folks could see what 'twas meant for, an' Charlie to find his awn paint.

A chap of many parts, Strickland was—most wonnerful man ever turned out of Chaggyford, by all accounts, an' amazin' high conceit of hisself tu. A fellow wi' twenty different ways of turnin' a penny. The man kept bees; he was handy at stone-cutting also, an' could chip a angel or a devil for a church rainspout, or do a gravestone wi' the best; he was a sign-writer an' a fisherman also. In fact, he killed more trout in season an' sold it for sixpence a pound than you'd credit. A terrible clever shotsman wi' a rifle, tu, he were, an' wan as feared nought on four legs. Farmers an' squires would always get un to break in theer colts, for 'twas what he did cleverest of all; an' if he'd been a little chap 'stead of a tidy big wan, he'd 'a' gone for a horse-jockey, an' very likely got into a duke's stables. As it was, he rode out steeple-chasin', an' was accounted a rare man for a horse. Yet, if you'll believe it, his faither

weern't no account at all—awnly gude to cut fuzz an' sweep muck, which he done for fifty year, then died wi'out a friend or enemy in the world.

But young Strickland, for all his business, an' bustle, an' bounce, an' generous opinion of his awn paarts, had more friends than counsellors. Auld men shook their heads against un as a chap too dazmlin' in his qualities, but the gals shaken their curls for un, because he was always set that way, an' he loved their praise, an' was wan of the dashin', knock-me-down sort as takes women by storm. A brown head of hair the man had, an' bold eyes, an' a gert power of patience wheer he took a fancy.

An' Mary Applebird—poor fule—though she knawed what sort of carактер the chap carried, took an' loved un, an' he was heart and sawl for her. Time shawed as she'd really got to the core of the man, an' might have been the very woman to steady his spirit ; but faither was against un, though Polly's tears might have softened a stone. Raven dark my sister was—eighteen year auld then—wi' a li'l' mouth so red as a

quarrender apple, an' always a thought open, so's you could see her purty teeth shining. Eyes she had of autumn-colour, like the dead leaves betwixt brown an' gold; an' she was a bowerly wench, simple an' true, as believed in the man, an' trusted un same as you trust the sun to light to-morrow.

The picksher was painted in a outhouse behind the inn, an' theer, many an' many a long hour, Charlie dawdled over his work, while Polly wasted her time an' watched un unbeknawnst to faither. That crafty the young man was that he took thrice so long as need be awver his job, an' so theer weern't no profit in the signboard to him.

An' my sister, just because faither was pleased wi' the work, thought as he'd take kind to the painter tu. But my faither reckoned Strickland no match for any darter of his. Applebirds weer always bettermost among the village folk of Little Silver, while Stricklands weer nought afore this dashin' chap comed; so when Charlie tried for our Mary he got a very short answer.

"You've done your job all right," faither

said, "an' if you've awnly used stuff as'll stick to the wood come bad weather, I'll say you're a sound workman. But Polly's a differ'nt matter. No call to waste words or give reasons. She ban't for you, an' theer's an end of it."

Easy to talk! The young chap flared up like a bonfire, an' wanted to knaw what any man had against un; but faither wouldn't listen to no argeyments at all, an' the up-shot was that off Strickland went, an' him an' Mary kept company in secret for a matter of three months after.

Then the man dropped in to see my faither again—wan evenin' arter closin' time. I mind it tu well, for Polly told me as he was comin', an' prayed as I'd be theer to see how it falled out. Well, he was in a very upsome vein then. He talked big words, an' wouldn't take "No" for an answer.

When faither was faaced wi' things as vexed un sharp like that, the redness of his blood showed through his skin rose-bright, an' his gert fat hands hit at the thing nearest to him to hammer home his

words. An' now he hit an' hit a pewter pint-pot till the thing was scat so flat as if a waggon-wheel had gone awver it.

"You damn, young, bee-keepin' twoad of a bwoy—you dare!" rolled out faither. "You tadpole of a fellow, wi' your airs an' graces! What's the bwoys comin' to? Get out! Get out this instant moment, or worse may happen to 'e, fat as I be! Threaten me, would 'e? Theer! Get you gone out o' my sight, you box o' devil's tricks. If I come around the bar, gormed if I won't shake the life out of 'e. An' you speak to my maid again an' I'll set p'liceman upon 'e."

The young man looked ugly, an' I almost feared as theer'd have been a scuffle, in which, of coorse, faither must have gone down if the chap had been coward enough to put his finger on him. But he awnly spoke an' said as he'd make faither smart yet.

"You'll cuss yourself for this so well as me, Mister Applebird," he said. "I've offered you a square, honest offer to take your darter, as I loves very well, an' her

loves me. But now, God's my judge, marry Mary I won't, not until you goes on your knees to me an' begs my pardon."

Then he went off, rather than meet faither, as roared out like a bull till the glasses ringed again. Cold an' bitter the chap's voice was, an' the words of him had a ugly sound to my ear an' made me creep, though I didn't guess all they meant. An', as for faither, he was makin' noise enough hisself for a rampin' lion, an' didn't give no heed to what the other was sayin'.

He knawed soon enough, though; an' when I went up to the chamber wheer me an' Mary slept, an' I told her how contrary things had falled out below, she fainted off like a log, an' I beganned to fear terrible for her.

Awful weeks they was, for us hadn't no mother livin'. An' then it comed out, an' as ill luck would have it, the very day afore faither got to know theer was a li'l' wan comin', poor Mary quarrelled wi' her lover, an' he said he was weary of such a dog's life, an' meant to quit it an' go wheer the likes of him was wanted.

94 ANOTHER HEATH-HOUND

An' by the time faither'd fought wi' his pride an' swallowed enough to send a messenger for Strickland, the man was gone for a horse-sojer. He had a friend to some big town, an' theer was a gert call for sojers an' a certainty of fightin', so Charlie Strickland went an' left my sister wi' a solemn promise as he'd come back if he lived so to do. Next thing we heard from Chaggyford was that his regiment was off to help the French against the Roosians somewheers t'other end of the airth; an' more we never knawed or heard of un for two year or thereabouts. But much had happened in Little Silver afore he set foot in it again, though theer's never no change to the eye here, onless you look awver the churchyard wall.

Faither was hit very hard by it, an' from bein' a hale stout man, grawed auld-like an' beganned to drift down-hill. Mary bore herself brave enough, but my brothers turned against her an' was hard as women through pride, for the Applebirds be so auld upon the land as the oak trees to Godleigh Park; an' the name have long stood for

honesty in men an' virtue in maidens. Yet she kept her heart up, an' it stood to her for strength that Strickland would surely come back sooner or late, if God spared him. You see, Nature had tickled the man into this selfish bit o' wickedness, an' it was cruel hard 'pon the gal. Yet just so gude work's turned out wrong side the blanket as holy matrimony can show, for some heathen cause. Be it as 'twill, when the baaby did come, 'twould have done ample credit to any marriage smiled on by the Lard's Self an' holy angels. A dear li'l dinky bwoy as ever you seed or wanted to; an' the mother took heart of grace from un through just a few short weeks. But then trouble crowded us cruel close, an' the baaby comed to sad grief from a neighbour's cheel, as was called in to be useful 'bout the plaace; an' doctor found the gal third day she was theer an' packed her off, for he knawed she was awnly just better of the whoopin' cough. But the mischief had been done; the infant catched it an' fought away his short life 'pon my lap three weeks to a day arter he was born. So like his

faither in his ways tu! So awvermastering! To see un clench his hands an' fight against death wi' all his tiny strength! An' the same time 'twas borne in upon me, in dreams like, as his faither was doin' the very same thing long ways off. When the li'l' bwoy was numbered, an' doctor said us mustn't hope no more, I went for Parson Smedley to baptise un. By night it was—half after ten or so. An' maybe I spoke short of speech, for the auld gen'leman answered sharp to me, an' axed me to mind who I was talkin' to. Then he telled very larned, an' explained how the li'l' bwoy was born out of wedlock—as if I didn't knaw it! He talked till I could have shook him, grey an' old as he was, an' said at last that as to baptisin' of it, he'd look up somethin' in his blessed books an' come around in the marnin'!

Bwoy died just on midnight; an' faither was glad, an' went away to hide his joy; an' just three minutes after the breath he'd fought so braave for was out of his li'l' body, in comed parson, like the gude Christian he was at heart. I went down to awpen the door, an' he stood on the step, an' talked

as if it was sermon-time. I bided mute under the stars, I mind, an' stared at un while he rambled on full of comforting wisdom an' larning. Then he said as how he'd made it a matter of prayer, an' how on his knees, after his clothes was off, he'd been told to come theer an' then, an' not waste a moment, or bide till day, but set off straight, so's the baaby should go to heaven, an' the rights an' wrongs of the case be settled theer.

"You'm very kind, but you'm too late, sir," I said. "Child's gone dead the minute afore you comed."

He gived a groan like, then axed—

"The mother?"

"Best not faace her," I told un. "For she'll do herself or you a injury, like as not, if she sees you now, sir. She was so set 'pon seein' her little wan sent to heaven." So he heaved a gert sigh into the night, an' went off. A very gude man, full of larnin'; but he always put such a power o' butivul words an' prayers between hissself an' the things as called to be done, that awftentimes they never got done at all.

98 ANOTHER HEATH-HOUND

And that's how Strickland's child an' Polly's comed in the world an' went out of it a double heathen—by his birth an' by his death. 'Tis awnly the gudeness of the lovin', watchin' God, you mind, as can find any plaace for the likes of that small, immortal soul. So 'tis hid in shape of a li'l' heath-hound, and roams the high lands with the rest, doin' faithful dooty there in storm an' shine, at the heels of the Evil Wan, year 'pon year, until the Crack o' Doom. An' I doubt nothin' but that the gude Lord o' childern will save un yet, and find some humble plaace in heaven for his li'l' sawl, as us found a humble plaace in airth for his li'l' body. An' who be wise enough to say "No"?

As if that wasn't all a pair o' young shoulders could carry, theer comed bad news of the man three months after, an' Mary, who had never got awver her li'l' one's death, 'peared to fling up all hope or care for life then. For, you see, his name was in a list of the killed. A Okehampton chap seed it to Exeter printed out there. An' my sister just withered away arter that shock,

an' never a young, broken-hearted woman welcomed death so willing as she.

But theer'd been a mistake, or else the man to Okehampton had misread, for Charlie Strickland, though wounded pretty bad, weern't dead by no means, an' when he did come back a year later to marry her—a real hero now, wi' a trail of glory arter him as long as a comet—the clods were grawed together awver her.

He felt so much as a man built his way can feel. Then he went back again to the sojers an' was seen no more by us ; but afore he went he cut a butivul bit of freestone wi' his awn hands, an' carved a fat-faaced cherubim 'pon it, an' told in tall letters how that Mary Applebird lay onderneath, an' how that the stone was a lovin' tribute to her memory, set theer by Sergeant Charles Strickland, of the English Light Cavalry, as fought the whole Roosian Army to Balaclava, onder his greatness the Earl of some plaace—I forget wheer. Then the stone said how Strickland had killed three men, an' been wounded all awver, but hanged on to his horse an' got out of it by a miracle, an'

recovered wi' the loss of two fingers. Last it telled about his medals.

An' when the man was gone, seein' his monument 'peared to be wan word for our Polly an' a hunderd for hisself, my brothers pulled up the stone, an' brawk it in pieces, an' thraved it by the wayside. An' when he heard what they had done, Parson Smedley talked a deal about such high-handedness, but did nought.

I've awften wished as I could hear the tail-end of Strickland's history; but 'tis hidden. He was a chap bound to go up or down—couldn't bide quiet in a peaceful callin' along of his restless mind.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

THE tale I be gwaine to tell 'e do hang about an old bygone blacksmith an' the Squire of Godleigh Park. Timothy Mudge was the blacksmith's name—him as took to farming an' came to such a dreadful end arter ; an' Squire in them days chanced to be one Captain Aylmer Yeoland, gert uncle to present Lard o' the Manor.

He was a dashing blade, as had gone for a soldier in his youth, but gived up fightin' when he comed to the inheritance for lack of a nearer kinsman. An' he settled down to be the big man hereabouts ; an' very well thought upon tu. You see he filled the eye, an' the voice of un rolled loud 'pon the ear ; so he got credit all along of his braave outward show, 'cause folks judged the inner

man from the outer, same then as now. Which be a deed so clever as judgin' a chest of tea from the butivul heathen picter 'pon the lid of un.

Aylmer Yeoland took up the reins of power wi' a gert dash an' clatter. He was built to be a big twoad in a small puddle, an' Little Silver folks, well used to the Lords o' Godleigh for better, for worse—as a maid takes a man in marriage—hoped that time would prove un a gude master.

Which it done, 'cause, for all his soldier sharpness an' roarin' voice an' hard eyes, the man was a just man, an' had more o' the milk o' human kindness in un than what he'd got pluck to pour out.

"He'll take a wife come bymebye," folks said; "then he'll graw softer o' speech an' drop his turkey-cock gobble-gobble a bit." Dreadful proud-like was all Yeolands in them day; dreadful proud, an' so contemptuous o' money as though 'twas no account at all, 'stead of being the backbone of the whole airth.

An' so he lived his life, wi' a Lucifer spirit in un, an' a swelling chest an' a raking

stride, an' catkin-coloured moustaches, as curled right up under his eyes when he gived 'em a twist in his fierce moments. A gert sportsman him; M.F.H. tu; an' 'twas in the character of a hunting-man as the tale comed out how my gran'faither, Timothy Mudge, gived Squire a bellyful, an' teachd un things he didn't knaw. For "out o' the mouths o' babes an' sucklings" God have willed as the wise should larn a lesson now an' again; an' at the fistes o' gran'faither—purty nigh so big an' hard as his awn sledge-hammers—my gen'leman took his dose an' shawed arterwards the stuff he was made of. I call un a gert man, an' so he was, or I never heard tell of such.

Tim Mudge stood two inches awver Squire, though the Captain was six foot tall if the truth's told. They was both men 'bout thirty year auld, an' both bachelors, though gran'faither was keepin' comp'ny. A blacksmith he was, so hard as a bag o' nails, an' took a huge pride in his upper arms, 'pon which the muscles rippled up in monstrous lumps, like inji-rubber, when he flexed his elbows. An' Squire gived out as

Tim was the strongest man of his hands in Little Silver, 'cepting awnly hisself; an' blacksmith in his secret heart reckoned he was the strongest, bar none. But they was gude friends enough, an' Captain Yeoland never would let no man but Mudge shoe any steed of his; an' he let the smith feesh in his private water on the river, an' spoke well of un all times. Then, as bad fortune would have it, there falled out a grave matter of difference between 'em; an', most coorious to say, it rose 'pon a subject both had nearer to heart than 'most any you might name. That was dogs. I reckon they loved dogs better'n anything but their hopes o' salvation. They lived for dogs, in a manner o' speaking, an' each, 'cordin' to his station, had a mort o' dogs a-yelpin' an' a-hoppin' an' a-pawin' round un, an' a-runnin' free as air through every chamber of his house. Neither was married, as I say, else theer mightn't a'bin such a kennel o' dogs everywheers; for I reckon myself as theer ban't anything much easier to overdo about a house than dogs. An' my wife's at one wi' me in that opinion.

Then comed the high tragedy, an' a pokin', pryin' young fule, by name of Smedley—son of Parson Smedley, who was vicar in them days—seed Mudge cropping the ears of a terrier. 'Twas for the betterment o' the beast, 'cause nature 'pears to have gived some sorts o' terrier dog a bit more ear-drop than they wants in theer manner o' life; an' the li'l' bitch if her'd knawed as her master was awnly paring down her ears a trifle for her comfort in sporting, I lay she'd have thanked un grateful 'stead o' hollerin' as if Day of Judgment had come. 'Twas like to make her look a deal smarter tu; an' females being same in all breeds, she might have been pleased to knaw it. But her howled naturally at the sting o' the knife, and Smedley—a slack-twisted ninny, by all accounts, as wouldn't have killed the flea that bit un—waxed wrathful, an' went so far as to take a summons against blacksmith for cruelty to animals.

Squire Yeoland was Justice o' the Peace, an' Mudge, he laughed to think as he'd be fetched up afore him. For what them two didn't knaw 'bout dogs wadden worth

knawin'. But things turned out contrariwise, arter all, as they'm very apt to do if a body be tu cocksure. Anyway, the Justice didn't take Timothy Mudge's part as he expected.

Maybe the chap was awver-bold, for when he comed up for judgment, Squire, as was sittin' high an' solemn in the seat o' the mighty, didn't 'pear to know un 'tall; an' when the defendant beganned about folks as didn't know a dog's nose from his foot, the Justice cut'n short in a voice like Bull o' Bashan. Then Timothy, as could be comical-tempered tu, along of his fiery calling no doubt, got nasty, an' theer was a sharp crossin' o' swords.

"You know, so well as I can tell 'e," sez Squire, "that theer's no mention o' terriers in the Act. You've done what weern't lawful, an' you'm under the law."

"Law be damned!" sez t'other. "You'm a just man, I doubt, an' a gude sportsman tu; so law or no law," he sez, "you ban't gwaine to punish me for what you've done, or ordered to be done, scores o' times your awn self!"

"Never, never in my life," answers Squire, gatherin' up his passion.

"What 'bout the hounds, then?" snaps back Tim. "You round the ears of your five-an'-twenty couples, doan't 'e? Coourse you do, an' because I've done the like to a li'l' terrier bitch, no bigger'n my hand, I'm haled afore 'e by that fiddle-faced fule as if I'd done a crime. An' you, in your judgment-seat, do know as common sense be my side."

But Yeoland didn't 'pear to like such talk afore the Court assembled. More especial as nought touches up a man like truth when he doan't want to hear it. Mudge had put his hand to a weak spot in law, no question. For 'tis plain as a dog be a dog, an' wherefore should us have such a tender regard for a terrier's feelin' an' not care a cuss 'bout foxhounds? Anyhow, Squire, he turned sunset colours afore the onslaught o' blacksmith, an' twirled his moustaches to his eyelids, an' bristled like a hedge-pig wi' mighty indignation.

"What I do is one thing, what you do be another, Timothy Mudge," he said; "an'

it's like your brazen-faaced insolence to dare to dictate to me!"

Of coourse, he was in a flaring, hell-fire rage, else he wouldn't have made such a shaw of hisself an' got so out of the part of a Justice.

He gived it to prisoner for five mortal minutes by the assembly-room clock to Okehampton, wheer the trial was held. Then he wound up his speech an' told Tim as he'd fine un a guinea for a fust offence, which he must pay to once. Then Timothy, he hurtled down a pound an' a shillin' 'pon the clerk's table, an' forgot hisself in open court, and said—

"Theer 'tis then, but, God's my judge, I'll have that out of you again, Aylmer Yeoland. You've done a wrongful deed this day; you've held the scales of the law crooked, an' you know it; an' you ban't no more worthy to be marked down for Justice of the Peace than thicky chair!"

Then he marched out afore Squire had time to larn how much he might put on un for contempt of court. He marched out like a storm, an' black rage dazed un, I judge,

for he couldn't see straight for passion, as he told his gal, Damaris Earwaker, arterwards.

He got across to the White Hart Inn fust, an' telled out his wrongs to any as would listen, an' he took a drop more'n was wise in the telling, no doubt. Then he set off home-along to Little Silver, an' tramped awver the Moor to blow the liquor out of his head. He went by way of the Belstones an' Cosdon Beacon, an' struck the high road above Throwley, wheer a hill climbs up under some of them roundy-poundies what the 'auld men' lived in so long back as Bible times. Then, who should he see a-drivin' along in his dog-cart but Squire. As luck or the devil would have it, Yeoland was alone, 'cause he'd left his man to Okehampton 'pon some errant; so theer he drove by hisself; an' t'other seed un, an' a flame worked in the heart of Timothy Mudge. He stood 'pon murderer's ground tu, coorious to say, for he weern't above a hundred yard from the identical spot wheer Ben Rowe slayed a man called Jacob Chowne the year afore, an' only got penal servitude for it, thanks to the Chap-

lain at Exeter gaol, after being ordained to death.

As Squire walks his horse up the steep pinch, up comes blacksmith, so bold an' sinful as any highwayman; an' Yeoland, not seein' what was in t'other's eyes, greets un quite cheerful, 'cause wi' the majesty of the law off un he was just a gen'leman again. But afore he could crack his joke an' chide the man for makin' a fule of hisself, Mudge was upon un like a roarin' lion of Scripture. Up he goes to horse's head an' lays hand to rein; whereon Yeoland blamed soon snorted fierce as need be an' axed him what the blazes he thought he was doin' of—in proper gen'leman's English, of course. An' t'other sez—

“I want my guinea, Captain Yeoland; an' I be gwaine to have it, or the worth of it.”

'Twas oil to fire, no doubt, an' Squire he skipped out of his trap quicker'n light, an' let his butivul, valuable horse go wheer he would an' thrawed off his coat an' walked up in the grassy place wheer blacksmith stood.

"Right, my bold rascal," Yeoland sez. "I've long wondered if you was so gude as you looked," he sez. "Now us'll find out."

They went at it like heroes, an' 'tis pity no mortal eye seed the bout, for 'twas a braave piece of fightin'—heavy-weights both, an' both in earnest. All Timothy could call home arter was that they fought theerselves to a stan'still time an' again; then, so soon as they could put up theer hands, they went on. He said as it 'peared to be a month o' Sundays they was busy theer, an' many a time arter he cussed the drink he'd took to Okehampton afore that battle. 'Cause, though not bosky-eyed wi' it, yet he weern't at his very fightin' best; whereas if he'd been empty o' beer, 'twould have been the savin' clause an' given un the upper hand.

'Twas a awful long an' a awful bloody battle, an' nothin' done to the end. The men hammered one another to the truth of music, as the saying is; but both was so hard an' so strong that theer weern't no provin' which was best. Now one got the upper hand, now t'other, an' at last they was so dog beat that neither could stand

arter they'd wrastled for five minutes—in the kicking Cornish fashion 'twas—an' falled side by side into the road onderneath 'em, wi' smashed faces an' a' blooded from their eyebrows to their boots. They lay gruntin' an' sweatin' theer, neither wi' strength in un to get on his legs an' crow victory.

Mudge telled arter how he thought as he was stricken for death, 'cause Squire, wi' gert knowledge o' fightin', had kep' hittin' of him awver the heart; an' Squire weern't in no better case, as he confessed arterwards, though 'twas not till some time arterwards, certainly.

They bided their wi'in a few yards of each other, a-gaspin' an' a-gurgling, an' rubbing the blood out of their eyes an' ears, an' countin' their ribs, the pair of 'em; an' Tim couldn't speak, though theer was a thought in un that if he hadn't catched the value of his guinea 'twas a pity, for he didn't knaw what he'd gived—he awnly knawed what he'd gotten. Then they slowly gathered strength, wi' not a word betwixt them; an' the gloamin' comed down grey an' wisht awver the Moor, an' so lonely

was the way that not a sawl passed by, an' Squire's horse moved here an' theer, cropping wheer he could, an' weary o' waitin', no doubt. Matched to a hair them men must have been, for, just as Squire got on his feet wi' a powerful effort, up rose Timothy likewise. Both was groggy to the knees, same as drunkards, an' 'tis a fact that men what runs awver six foot tall do awften be weak to the knee; an' a cheel could have thraved 'em in the ditch easy as a couple o' kittens, so spent they was.

Yeoland looked at blacksmith an' ope'd his mouth to speak an' offer un a lift home, but the high stomach of un couldn't bring itself to say the word, an' he shut his mouth again an' walked awver to his trap, an' climbed in wi' a huge effort and grievous pangs.

"I do b'lieve as he meant to ax me to get up behind—just to see if I'd got kick enough left to do it," Mudge always said when he telled the tale; "but he couldn't get the words out, an' I doan't blame un 'tall. An' 'twas in my heart to beg his pardon, but I couldn't get words out

neither; an' I doan't blame myself no more'n him."

Be that as 'twill, off goes Squire snail-slow, an' t'other had to use his legs an' walk; which he done. 'Twas well past nightfall when he got home, an' he was just creeping in his cottage, well pleased as nobody'd seen un, when theer stood Damaris Earwaker—the young maiden what he was courtin'. Her'd been waitin' for un in a panic o' doubt for hours an' hours; an' he told her rough to get going, an' tried to hide his face from her. But she weern't put off so, an' soon seed what a jakes of a mess the man was in. Being stout-hearted, her didn't holler nor nothin', but just looked to the wounds of un, an' ministered to un wi' soap an' water an' a tumbler o' hot spirits, an' horse liniment, an' brown paper an' what not.

He kep' his bed for two days, 'specting a call from a constable every hour an' a writ for prison, an' maybe six weeks' hard labour, if no worse. Auld Billy Blee, of Chagford, comed to see him tu, an' gived it as his opinion that 'twas assault with

intent to murder, an' a matter of five year, if not transportation. So poor blacksmith was very cheap when he thought of what lay in store for un, an' his gal, unbeknawnst, went down to Godleigh Park to see the Squire. But the gen'leman wouldn't see her; so she trapsed back again wi' a sore an' fearful heart. Third day, by a big effort, Mudge rose up from his bed, an' crawled into his clothes, an' come down house, an' went in the forge to work off the stiffness a bit wi' a light sledge. An' that very night, who should call 'pon un arter dark but Squire!

The two of 'em met without witnesses.

"You be about again then!" said Captain Yeoland grim-like, as if he was sorry to see it.

"Comed down off my bed this marnin', Squire."

"So did I," sez the gert man. "How heavy be you marked?" he goes on, scanning of his foeman.

"Right eye an' right ear, an' two teeth gone, an' a rib bended here an' theer, by the feel of it, Squire," sez Tim Mudge.

"My case so near as can be—though no teeth lost," answers Squire. Then he sighed an' said, "Not a pin to choose between us."

"You'm the purtier fighter, however," allowed Timothy; "though for hittin' I'm a thought weightier, I judge, as I should be, seein' I'd scale a stone more'n what you would."

Neither spoke for a matter of a minute; then Yeoland put his hand in his pocket an' fetched out a golden pound an' a silver shillin'.

"Here's a guinea for you," he said all of a sudden. "Not your guinea, you bear in mind, but one o' mine."

Mudge blinked, for he couldn't b'lieve his eyes.

"No call for no such thing," he said. "I'm a damn wicked, bowldacious chap to dare do what I done; an' I ought to be in clink along wi' the rogues for liftin' my hand to 'e."

"So you ought," sez Squire, cheerful as a cricket; "an' so ought a many others that ban't. Law's a coorious female, Mudge,"

he sez. "Theer's law an' theer's logic," he sez; "but they ban't always found in double harness."

Then his eyes caught sight of Timothy's li'l' terrier a-sittin' by the hearth. An' he girmed a gert military girn, an' twisted his moustaches ferocious, an' went his way, tryin' hard to walk as if he weern't dead lame.

PROVIDENCE AND TIM MUDGE

FOR my part, if I didn't knaw Providence to be in the right through thick an' thin, I could find in me to doubt if its scale o' payments was just now an' again. But our eyes ban't built to take a bird's-eye view of right an' wrong, or see all round a trouble. That's God A'mighty's way, an' awnly Him can do it.

Take Timothy Mudge, as fought wi' Captain Yeoland an' married auld Earwaker's darter. Theer was a man what started fair an' square, done his duty to Heaven an' to his neighbour, so far as you or me could judge, an' saved money. Which be the whole Law an' the Prophets in a nutshell. Yet the tiger bided hidden

in him; an' it comed forth—as was fore-ordained, no doubt; for we'm all tools in the hand o' the Lard, an' tempered 'cordin' to the work afore us. So I'll tell 'e what he done, an' the wage he got for doin' it.

You must know the man was a blacksmith to Little Silver—a master-smith wi' his awn forge, an' well knawn for a gude workman. A man as stood to his anvil, winter an' summer—allus smelled o' burnt horn, so to say—an' knawed the natur' of metal so well as he knawed the natur' of dogs. Yet, like his betters, he weern't no ways contented, an' had a wish to change his manner of life for another an' try farming. Them of the land laughed him out of his fulishness for a while, but things fell so that theer comed a time after Timothy had saved a bit of money that he followed his bent, being tempted to it as you shall hear.

Damaris Earwaker was his wife—a very worthy woman as loved the soil, an' soon grew sick of Little Silver, for she'd been used to an upland farm, out Fernworthy way, an' she was set 'pon gwaine back to that manner of life. She lowered herself awver

a bit to mate wi' Mudge at all, so some said; but she loved un very well, though the fiery calling of un she never could abide, an' as for the difference betwixt a Mudge an' a Earwaker, her awn brother was just a every-day pedlar, or "Johnny Fortnight," as they was called fifty year ago, when this thing fell out. These travelling chapmen tramped all awver the Moor, an' theer rounds was regular as sunrise. Some took tea an' sugar an' the like, an' some had fal-lals an' trinkrums for the women, toys for the childer, ribbons for the baabies' shoulder-knots, an' brooches an' weddin' rings, an' mournin' rings, an' many such keepsakes. Samuel Earwaker allus comed very punctual to his time, an' though here an' theer they laughed at his calling, those who knawed best said theer was no sort of doubt but that he made a gert deal o' money. He had his awn round o' villages, an' knawed to a hook-an'-eye what the people weer wanting. Never was such a "Johnny Fortnight" as him, though; apart from his business the man was a soapy, hookem-snivey beast as would rob a orphan of a farthing. Tall,

thin, pale, wi' hair like wet straw an' a psalm-smitin' voice—that was Samuel Earwaker. A text from Scripture was on his flabby lips most times, an' he devoured widows' houses in the name of the Lard. Thin as a mommet, or as you would say, a scarecrow, he weer—yet all wire an' whipcord, an' no contrary weather nor nothin' that man could do was ever knawn to keep him from wheer money 'was. He charged high allus, an' pinched wheer he dared to; yet, though other "Johnny Fortnights" was awnly tu proud to undersell un, it must be allowed as the man had the highest quality of gudes. His stuff—from gawld earrings to bootlaces—was of the best; so the people paid an' grumbled, an' swore they'd never deal with him no more, an' went to un, so meek as Moses, very next time he comed round. A hunderd mile a week an' more that man walked, year in year out. He wouldn't buy a pony because of the cost, an' sweated on foot under his fardel, very well content as his gains grew. When his faither died—as had ruined hissself farming, an' escaped bankruptcy by gwaine out o' the world so naked

as he comed into it—Samuel Earwaker, much to his wrath, was called upon to bury the auld ancient. An' he gived his faither cheapest deal coffin as ever comed out of Little Silver, an' even then he fell out cruel wi' the ondertaker because he wouldn't return no discount on ready money.

Samuel an' his brother-in-law, Timothy Mudge, was very unfriendly after the marriage of Damaris Earwaker. "Johnny Fortnight" wanted Tim to put some money in his business, an' Tim wouldn't, an' it grawed into a grievance; while the woman, for her part, when she larned her husband had no less than two hunderd an' more pounds put by, was loud wi' un to take a li'l' farm 'pon the Moor. At fust he wouldn't listen to neither; but theer comed a day when Mudge an' Samuel Earwaker fell out openly, an' for once the chapman let his oily tongue get into the vinegar. He angered blacksmith so that Tim thraved down his sledge, tore off his leather aporn, an' walked straight in the street wheer t'other stood a-sneering. 'Twas by the spot wheer the stream runs out o' Little Silver churchyard

into a pond, an' Mother Forde's ducks get the very fat of the burying-ground into 'em. An' "Johnny Fortnight" told Mudge as he weer no better'n a lost sawl, beyond the power o' Christ's self to save; an' Tim just took un by the niddick, same as you might a kitten, an' hove the blasphemous twoad into the mud along wi' the ducks an' watercress. Such a tantara! Travellin' in Britannia metal he was; an' blacksmith flinged all his things in after him; an' the ducks quacked an' spluttered through the mess, an' the tea-pots sinked in; an' Earwaker rose up out o' the mire wi' a face like the Dowl risin' from the pit o' darkness.

Theer was a brave upstore, I do assure 'e, an' "Johnny Fortnight" fished out his tea-pots an' such-like, an' said as how he'd have the law of Tim if it cost him a Jew's eye. But 'twas awnly dirt an' fright he suffered from, an' not so much as a teaspoon was lost; an' when case comed up afore Captain Yeoland of Godleigh, as was the Justice of the Peace in them days, he heard both sides very patient, an', being a friend of Mudge, through certain dealings in dogs, he up in

all the majesty of the law an' tawld Samuel Earwaker to go to blazes. An' he tawld him 'tweern't his work to damn anybody, an' that if he'd done it to him, he'd have sarved un same as Timothy did. Of coorse folks said the Captain was one-sided because of his auld famous fight with Tim; but I doan't think it. Weern't in that Yeoland to be anything but fair an' square.

So Earwaker went his way an' kept his awn secret, which was to be upsides wi' Mudge by hook or crook, an' make the blacksmith sorry that ever he'd been born. A fox of a chap, for sartain, though wheer he got his cunning from none ever larned. His faither was little better'n a fule, an' his mother so simple as a sheep all times. So 'twas just lack of schooling, no doubt, as be a fruitful source of wickedness. Not that I hold with half the things childer be taught nowadays—flying in the faace of theer pastors an' masters. An' I'm sure I'm very glad as I shall be gone 'fore the present rising generation graws up, for, come they be men an' women, they'll do the whole

duty of man by steam, an' make the Word o' God a laughing-stock.

Anyway, "Johnny Fortnight" said he'd be revenged, an' this is how he done it. Fust he was reconciled wi' his brother-in-law, an' Mudge—a honest, generous fashion of man—believed him an' made it up, an' even said he was sorry as he'd treated his wife's awn brother so fierce. Then they grawed into close friendship by gradual stages, until Mudge trusted t'other like a cheel trusts his faither.

'Pon the strong advice of Samuel, the blacksmith went his silly way, an' gived up his job, an' looked around for a small farm. Damaris, the wife of un, urged him on likewise, an' at last they found the very plaace—a God-forgotten, li'l' auld spot by name of "Newtake Barton," out 'pon the Moor, under a scraggy sycamore tree or two, wi' poor, beggarly, starved acres around it an' a woebegone look in the very windows. 'Twas a mere record of failures, yet Mudge, wi' his gert power of hope, counted 'pon the strength of his body, when everybody knaws 'tis the Lard's Right Hand, an' not the

farmer's, as us must look to if we wants for to succeed in that walk o' life. Never a man with credit for sense would have thrawed away his savings in such a venture ; but at the dictation of that snake of a "Johnny Fortnight" Tim set out wan autumn time, an' reckoned to tide the winter easy an' plant corn—poor daft fule—an' then, come spring, he ordained to buy stock.

He just done what he was told, an' wheer the awnly ghost of hope was oats, he put in wheat—as you might so well have sowed on Cosdon Beacon or in Cranmere Pool—just because t'other man advised it. Everybody tawld un he was a born fule ; but when they did that, he pointed to his brother-in-law an' said—

"Whatever I be, he'm no fule. What he sez is right, an' I'll trust him ; for he's makin' a fortune at his awn callin', an' be gwaine to help me make wan."

So theer mouths was shut, an' no pusson liked to tell Tim that his brother-in-law was a knave as meant to ruin him, because it would have brought down the anger of

Mudge upon 'em. Yet that was the solemn truth; and the poor sawl found it out for hisself afore the seasons had rolled round wance.

Winter comed—hardest ever was knawn, by all accounts—an' they had cruel times to Newtake Barton. Damaris hungered for more warmth than there was in peat, an' Tim wished hisself back along by his forge full many a time. But he looked forward with calm hope to spring. They was under the weather purty deep from the start, however, for a little wan was comin', an' the wife had to bide home, an' do no more than feed the fowls; and Tim got kicked by his hoss, and went lame till arter the New Year.

But he kept a cheerful heart, an' pictured the green corn snug an' strong under the snow. Then come the rise of the sap—as do rise slower the higher you be, seemingly—an' he beganned to find what poor speed his farmin' was like to have. 'Twas a wretched, strangled crop as showed for his gude grain, because fern an' fuzz, an' heather, an' hurtleberries be all as peat'll

bear; so when snow was gone the land peared black, sulky, an' promisin' nothing to name, though the corn as he'd put in it might have made bread for the King's table. His brother-in-law sold him the grain for that matter; an' now from day to day Tim Mudge's eyes was opened, an' he seed clear and clearer as he'd pinned his faith to the wrong post. He grewed passionate an' ferocious-like, an' then, after a month apart, them men met 'pon the Moor—"Johnny" gwaine wan way, an' Tim the other.

Nought theer was to see 'em but God A'mighty an' a pony or two; but the Lard o' Hosts ban't a deponent as you can call in a court o' law ezacally, as Samuel Earwaker very well knawed, so he spoke the truth for wance, theer being no witness, an' turned 'pon t'other onder the grey of a spring gloaming, an' shawed his yellow teeth, like a auld rat, an' spit out all the hate he'd cherished against Timothy since blacksmith flinged him in the duckpond.

"Stop, Samuel Earwaker!" sez Tim, "an' tell me why for you bid me plant

that corn you sold me, you anointed villain!"

An' the man answered—

"I sold you what you bought at Little Silver when you thraved me in the water; I sold you what you earned then, for I said I'd ruin you—I swore it—an' ruined you stand, or will 'fore the summer. Go to the swamp you call a farm an' look around you, an' then ax yourself if theer's a bigger fule than you this side of Exeter. I sold you the plaace you've earned in the workhouse, damn you! Theer you'll come—you an' your wife tu, an' your cheel tu, as I wouldn't lift a finger to better. I hate you, an' now you knaw it, gull and dolt that you be!"

Then he made off so quick that t'other, who still travelled lame, couldn't catch un. Earwaker went his way, like a black raven, an' the farmer just glazed after un wi' his jaw dropped, an' a gert fear an' horror 'pon his forehead. Then Timothy laughed like a piskey—a horrid sound, for sure—an' looked in the sky, an' cursed heaven an' airth, an' so went home to his woman.

From that day he fed his wrath on drink,

which be very fatting food for passion. He got so reckless as a grasshopper, an' sinked from right to wrong terrible quick, sure enough; for theer's no quicker short cut than that what leads out of the narrow road into the broad wan.

Mrs. Mudge, she done all she could, wi'out a doubt. By day she prayed the man to mend his ways, by night she prayed the Lard for un; but 'tween't no manner of use, seemin'ly. Tim had been put in the world for a coorious, fatal purpose, an' that purpose he fulfilled. His anger burnt him up heart an' sawl. To be even wi' "Johnny Fortnight" was all his wish, an' he put it afore his duty to his wife, or his neighbour, or his unborn infant.

Newtake Barton do lie upon the Moor—a very wisht, lonesome spot even in high summer; a plaace torn away from the wild land by the sweat of man's brow, an' awnly kept free of ferns, an' heather, an' such-like weeds by eternal labour. A spot as calls home the auld saying to your mind, for the Moor speaks it so plain as airth can speak to them as walks upon it. "You scratch my

faace, an' I'll pick your pocket!" it sez. An' many a pocket have it picked, sure enough, an' a heart broken tu, here an' theer. You wants to be born wi' a silver spoon in your mouth an' a bit of Dartmoor granite in your backbone to do any gude up-along.

So Tim Mudge dranked away the little he had left, an' kept his hand from the battle; an' as his shillings got fewer, his gert wrong grawed, until a climax comed on a moony night in late spring. Then he up from the settle wheer he'd been sittin', swearin' at principalities an' powers, an' Samuel Earwaker in particular, an' took his gun down from above mantel-shelf an' loaded it wi' duck-shot.

"What be doin' now?" Damaris, his poor wife, axed un.

"I be gwaine to shoot a fox," he said short-like.

Her heart went in her mouth then, for she knawed 'twas Friday, 'pon which evening "Johnny Fortnight" was used to walk to Little Silver from North Bovey by a way that passed certain farms 'pon the high

land. An' somehow 'twas borne in upon her that her husband meant to slay him.

"For God's gude sake doan't 'e go, Tim," she cried. "I can read 'e like a book, an' I knaw what's in your thoughts; but think o' me an' the li'l' wan comin'. Put the gun back home to its plaace, an' bide here an' talk wi' me, an' the Lard'll help us an' shaw us what us must do to mend our way."

"Lard's deaf 'pon Dartymoor," he said; "belike He's blind tu."

With that awful speech, out he went, an' in him was a mad thought to stop t'other 'pon the high road, and make him write an' sign a paper wherein was set out the truth so far as Mudge knawed it. 'Twas all a vain fule's trick, but it seemed gude to him in his muddled sawl; an' if "Johnny" wouldn't write or sign no such thing, then the wronged man reckoned to dress un down an' make un go sore for a month or so. But he never intended worse than that, an' the gun he awnly took to fright un, so he said. To smash the chap, so far as a blacksmith's arms could do it, was his darkest thought—as I have allus most

steadfastly believed an' swore to ; but others wouldn't never credit that.

Anyway, he went forth, an' his wife, near to her time as she was, couldn't bide in the house alone, an' crept after un, fearin' the worst. The road wheer Earwaker was to pass stretched out straight across the Moor hard by—like a streak o' silver set in coal ; and theer Tim went aquott behind a gert stone ; an' just as he seed a black spot 'pon the road half a mile away, something warm comed close to un, an' he heard a sob, an' his wife was theer, rubbing against un like a dog, an' whisperin' to un for the love of Heaven to hold his hand.

That angered un, with the black spot in the road getting larger an' larger ; an' he told Damaris to bide still an' not move a finger, or he'd scat her head in. So she sot alongside un pouring out prayers to God, an' hardening her heart to fight with un an' take her death from un if need be.

Samuel Earwaker come along whistling a hymn tune, an' last thing ever his eyes seed in this world was a shining steel barrel poking out from behind a rock ; an' last

thing ever he heard was Timothy's voice calling to un to stand still.

But the woman, in her awful fear as her husband lifted up the gun, an' not knawin' as he never meant to fire, jumped up an' hit his arm wi' all her strength, thinking to knock up the muzzle an' save her brother. Awnly what she done was different, an' just as Mudge shouted out wi' his finger on trigger, she hit un an' let off the fowling-piece. The charge took Earwaker in the faace at five yards an' blawed his wicked brains out in the road.

'Twas a gashly sight, I reckon—them three—two living an' wan dead—altogether in God A'mighty's sight onder the moon. An', come to think on't, I was theer tu—a kernel in the nut still—though them awful doin's, as curdled my dear mother's blood no doubt, left theer mark upon me, an' I'll carry blood-stains to my graave. Yet theer 'twas—the gert lesson of it; an' that night I was led into the paths o' righteousness even afore my mother bore me.

They fetched it in murder against my faither, for he'd said tu often, in his cups an'

out, what he meant to do for Earwaker. An' though five thousand of his fellow-creatures signed their names to a petition, the law flouted theer trouble an' hanged him to Exeter. He repented afore the day an' made a hopeful end, so chaplain told mother afterwards; but 'twas cruel hard he should pass out of life that way, for many what elbow you in the street have done worse.

Two months afterwards I was born; an' such is the contrary workings of Providence that, though the airth looked a plaace of little promise for the likes of me, yet I comed into the world wi' a lucky-hood* if you'll believe it! An' it saved my dear mother's life I do think, for such a happening could only be by the deliberate act of Heaven, an' shaws the watching Lard doan't forget the least of unhappy little wans. It comforted my mother's heart mightily; an' she took another wise step on her awn judgment, for afore I was tucked-up, or, as you might say, 'short-coated,' her went to Ludgvan, down to Cornwall, an' dipped me in a saint's well theer; which, seein' the blood in my li'l' veins,

* Lucky-hood = caul.

was a very proper thing to do, 'cause none baptized in thicky well can come to be hanged whether or no.

Such far-seein' things ban't accounted of nowadays, but they was fifty year ago. Anyway here I be, a man well-to-do, an' well thought upon, an' a churchwarden, thank God's gudeness.

“CHERRY RIPE”

SO the man was called, through no fault of his god-parents neither, but just by reason of his way of life, what turned his name from Isaac Ash into “Cherry Ripe,” as easy as you turn a galley-pot into a flower-vase. He was a younger brother to that auld ancient Ash as worked to Bear Down Farm. But whereas Churdles Ash bided single for love of the state, an’ out of sheer modesty some said, Isaac was turned towards matrimony in fulness of time, though it weern’t till well on in life that he cast about for a wife. Fifty year ago, it might have been, theer wasn’t a maid in Little Silver wouldn’t have said “Yes” to “Cherry Ripe”; but for all that he went his way an’ made his money with never a thought for ’em till Nature beganned just to whisper now an’ again, in a twinge of

rheumatics or a touch of bone-shave, that he mustn't expect to live for ever no more'n his betters.

But for the name first. "Cherry Ripe" he was, an' always will be so long as any hold him in mind; an' "Cherry Ripe" they ought to have set 'pon the graave of un by rights, for so he'm named and thought upon still; an' if you was to tell about Mr. Isaac Ash, why, the risin' generation wouldn't knaw who you meant from Adam.

Never such a smart man as him—not in pusson, for he was plain and untidy always, an' got the worth of his clothes, but in his mind and his business-like ways. 'Twas the fruit of his orchard down in valley-bottom won him the name, for cherries, you must knaw, be rare in these paarts. But some whimsical chap, as wasn't contented wi' apples an' pears, planted the cherry trees long, long ago—near two acres of them down below the cottage. Then the chap passed away an' auld Ash had the place—"Cherry Ripe's" faither he was; an' then he passed away an' it went to Churdles Ash by right; but he was always for some humble post

under other people's bidding, an' wouldn't think of taking the gert strain of mind and trouble belonging to two acres of land an' a cottage. So he had his bit in money, which he put in a tin mine under advice, an' lost; an' Isaac Ash had the ground an' orchard; and very well he done, being a practical man as sold his own stuff to the last berry, black an' white. He went round hisself to Chaggyford an' Ockington an' even Newton, sellin' to the people as wanted his cherries to eat, for he had a high contempt against middlemen, an' reckoned to keep all the profits theer was hisself. That meant hard work summer-time for him, but the cherries didn't come ripe all to wance, so he managed to sell the most out of his awn basket, and because he called "Cherry ripe! Cherry ripe!" wi' a very peculiar noise out of his throat, as comed to be well knawn; so "Cherry Ripe" was his name for evermore. True, he never liked it hisself, but he wasn't axed.

Then, after he'd passed the age of forty, the man bethought him as he couldn't stump the country with near a hunderdweight of

cherries for all time, an' reckoned he'd best set about raisin' up a son or two to follow in his shoes, fifteen or twenty years later on. Some thought he'd left it a bit late, but he judged not, for he knawed his awn worth to a shillin', an' with money an' the cherry orchard behind him, didn't fancy as he'd have to ax any sensible woman twice. As for the sort that weern't sensible, they wasn't for his market—so he said then, in his stiff-necked bachelor way. Tu overbearin' the man was for a lover, an' not ezacally so humble-minded as the females like to see a chap when he comes courtin'. Moreover, a bit grey in the whisker an' wrinkled in the forehead, an' very careless of his clothes. Took his food untidy tu, so they said—not as such slight failings was like to count against his bit in the bank, an' freehold cot, an' garden, an' other gert virtues.

Such a butivul garden as 'twas! Long slopes of rich tilth fust, airth so sweet as ever bore leaf an' root in season; then a patch o' small fruit, gooseberry an' raspberry for the most part; then apples, but not many, wi' rows of bloody warriors—or wall-

flowers, as you'd call 'em—grown onderneath the trees, Cornish fashion, for spring pickin'. Then a nice awpen bit, generally under 'taties, an' a filbert nut hedge, an' a very fine French nut tree—walnut, as you say—an' a gert purple patch o' pickling cabbage an' other matters, an' a row of glass frames for fetchin' on delicate luxuries. Then a braave pigs'-house or two—for pigs an' cabbages did ought to be grawed together always—an' then a gate leadin' down to the cherries. Such a snow shower as 'twas onder them trees in June! Then the leaves grawed an' made shade for the fruit as twinkled out through the green, an' shadows, an' sunshine, all crimson an' cream, wi' shiny black mazzards, an' Kentish “white-hearts,” an' other rare-class fruit. A gude bee-butt or two likewise, an' a 'mazin' border of herbs; an' I mind how a great patch of orange lilies grewed alongside the hives, an' also Mary-lilies—butivul gold an' silver clumps of flowers, wi' the bees in an' out of their hearts from dawn to sunset, a buzzin' li'l' songs of joy an' gladness, no doubt, to find their meat an' drink so near home.

Below the cherry trees theer runned a fence, an' on t'other side was Michael Hatherleigh's ground. A gude-fashion place he had tu, for a small man. A wife an' wan darter Hatherleigh had likewise, an' no more family. The gal's blue eyes looked as if every man they imaged was a surprise to 'em, an' theer was a pleasant, trustful way wi' her, most flatterin' to men-folk. A cooing, cuddling gal; an' more'n wan chap was set upon her, an' would have gone to the world's end for her. Specially a lad by name of Geoffrey Youngling—a moor-man in Duchy employ, an' well thought upon all his life. She liked him very fair, an' theer was a half onderstandin' between them, but no more, 'cause they knawed as her faither an' mother looked higher, an' wouldn't let such a poor man as Geof be seen walkin' out wi' her. Yet Youngling certainly had her "Yes" in secret. But he couldn't get it again—not when "Cherry Ripe" comed on the scene.

Joyce Hatherleigh was her name—a most shy an' downcast maid—so seeming modest as a wind-flower in a wood. An' a gert

gift of keepin' her thoughts to herself she had—which be rare even in graved-up women, an' a most terrible coorious thing in a maiden wi' blue eyes.

“Cherry Ripe” fust seed her awver his back fence, an' Hatherleigh's wife seed that he seed her; an' when the man had handed Joyce a gude half-pint of fruit on a cabbage-leaf twice in a week, an' she'd gone indoors wi' her lips all purple, Hatherleigh's wife had a long talk upon it wi' Hatherleigh. An' seein' as “Cherry Ripe” had never been knawn to give away so much as a windfall to man, woman, or cheel afore, them auld people thought theer might be a depth to it.

Then, when his “white-hearts” were ripe, an' the gal in the garden, he comed to the fence wi' a braave store of berries an' poured 'em in Joyce's apern, an' almost afore she'd got her mouth full, axed her to marry him, bein' a man very unwilling to waste time.

“If 'tis all wan to you,” he said, “us'll bide till my harvest be awver, an' I've got a little more leisure to wait 'pon 'e; then

us'll be married when you see your way to it, an' I can promise 'e a gude husband, if no more."

Gal gasped, an' comed near swallowing a cherry-stone or two, no doubt, but she had strength of mind not to say "No"; awnly she bolted home-along, an' dropped his butivul "white-hearts" all awver the garden.

Next day "Cherry Ripe" called to see her faither.

"She was too dumbfounded, by the look of it, even to give me 'thank you,'" he said, "an' she flinged half a pint o' my best fruit in the dirt, which shaws a silly disposition; but I'll make allowance for that, the matter taking her unawares. I'm for marryin' her in the autumn, if she's willin'; an' I may say, wi'out gwaine beyond the truth, as she'll have best husband in Little Silver, as you an' your missus very well knaws, if Joyce doan't." An' they did know—nobody better; an' when Joyce heard how, come fulness of time, she'd own the land both sides of the fence, she 'peared to see the force of the reasonin',

an' made it very plain to the chap, Geoffrey Youngling, as the case was altered.

Lard, how she twisted the fruit-grower to her way tu—at first! Folks thought 'twas a mere practical match, an' judged theer weern't no room in the busy man for love-makin' an' such softness; but theer's no fule like an auld fule, an' no auld fule like wan set on a woman. Hard nut of a man as he was, Joyce Hatherleigh had un friskin' like a spaniel for her in a fortnight—ay, just so soft an' moonstruck as any gawk of twenty—which shaws wheer a young woman's cleverer than a auld man. An', to the eye, you'd have said the gal was heart-deep in love wi' un, an' so proud an' happy as a pretty maid need wish to be. She let un give her gert gifts; an' she wandered among the cherry trees with un, her eyes so soft as summer skies, an' never one sight of that east-wind look as poor Geof Youngling had seed in 'em when she sent him about his business. Ess, she walked in his garden wi' his arm round her, an' tasted the cherries an' purred, an' larned the value of the different fruit, an' took

such a fancy to the best that he made wan tree awver to her, crop an' all, which shaws the lengths he'd gone that such a hard man should absolutely demean hisself to lose money for her whim. Thirty shillin' to two pounds he was said to have thraved away by it.

But other of God's creatures besides gals do like a ripe cherry now an' then, an', along of three mild springs an' winters, it fell out that the song-birds that year was a reg'lar scourge. Never you seed such a power o' greedy blackbirds an' grey-birds in all Little Silver. Indeed, "Cherry Ripe" swore as he'd be ruined by the bowldacious things, for his fruit was no sooner come to ripeness but the trees weer full o' robbers, as 'peared to know just the day before the master when his fruit was ready for picking. An' the way they spoil the berries—just takin' a pinch an' leaving each ruined wi' a gashly gash in un—fairly drove the man mad. He got savage wan marnin', an' after he'd done more harm in a minute wi' a great charge of birdshot than the birds had in a day, he caught his awn foot in a fowler's net he

was trying to get awer a tree, an' falled, an' hurted his ankle so bad that he had to hire a chap to carry fruit three days, which was a gert trouble to un.

Then he hit 'pon a new thought—to kindiddle the birds wi' a show; an' bein' lame an' on the spot all hours, he set about the makin' of a mommet, or, as you'd say, a scarecrow. This he ordained to stick up in Joyce's tree, so as she at least should have her cherries wi'out toll paid to the birds. He wasn't used to lettin' his workin' clothes go while much of 'em hanged together, I assure 'e; an' he had auld rags in different states o' ruin, for different weathers and different duties. So now he got some rubbish, an' the worstest garments he'd kept by him, an' made a fantastic creation wi' a straw head an' arms an' legs, an' wan of his awn hats stuck 'pon the top of all.

It chanced that a chap by name of Charles Strickland passed the place just as “Cherry Ripe” was putting the last touches to the mommet, an' he was so pleased that he falled into the spirit of the thing, an' offered

to help all he could. Which, he bein' no small artist in his way, might be called a gude offer. Strickland was a wonnerful clever chap, an' a sign-writer amongst other callings; so he set to work, just for love of his own cleverness, an' never charged nothin' at all. Wi' a gert dob of putty he covered the straw faace; then made whiskers wi' a bit of auld grey wool stockin' frayed out; then painted the thing wi' black eyebrows an' crinkly forehead, an' a nose like a tor, an' a blue muzzle an' thin, hard lips; an' "Cherry Ripe" was just laughin' an' sayin' the thing was the image of a monkey, and would frighten the Dowl himself, when Bill Karslake, the p'liceman, passed by the gate. Then Charlie called out to un an' bid un come in an' have a see. Then Strickland said—

"Look at this here mommet, will 'e? Can 'e put a name to it, Bill?"

An' Karslake, he said, so innocent as you might—

"'Struth!" he said, "if 'tisn't the very daps of you, Mr. Ash—never seed such a cruel clever likeness outside of a photograp!"

“Cherry Ripe” didn’t laugh no more after that, but just told p’liceman to go to hell shortest way, an’ Strickland after him. Then he looked at the dummy as though he’d got a sour plum in his cheek, an’ said, out loud, “If I be like that, sooner banns is up the better, else her’ll be changing her mind.”

When the men was gone he stared a bit more at the scarecrow, an’ ’peared in two minds whether to use it or burn it; but he weern’t a sentimental man by nature, an’ ’twas no more than the gal’s cunnin’, purty speeches as had made him just forget, for the time, like, that he was ugly enough for a show. So he smiled to hisself, an’ let his heart warm to the young woman as could love him for all his foul face. Then he went limpin’ down to the cherry orchard, an’ sticked the gert puppet up in Joyce Hatherleigh’s tree.

He was most ’mazed hisself, I believe, to see how much like a livin’ man it looked theer; an’ it took a slant against a bough so natural as need be; an’ he made fast the legs of it tight, an’ set up the arms, as

though 'twas pickin' fruit. Then he was pleased, an' went an' hid alongside the bottom fence, just to see what the plaguey auld birds would make of it when they comed for more cherries.

Theer was a vegetable-marrow vine what grawed 'pon a muck-heap down to the bottom of the orchard onder the fence in a li'l' lew cornder; an' theer he sot hissself down 'pon the airth, an' just pulled a few sprays of the marrow across his body so's birds wouldn't see un. Then he lighted his pipe an' waited very patient to see what the fowls of the air would make of his double perched aloft.

A bird or two comed wance or twice, an' caught sight of the scare an' bolted, the blackbirds hollerin' as if 'twas theer last moment; then "Cherry Ripe," very well content, was just gwaine to the house when he heard voices t'other side the fence, an' peeped through a knot-hole, an' seed his Joyce an' a fine young person—a friend of hers, as served in a linen-draper's to Exeter, an' was at Little Silver for a holiday. They comed to the fence, an' 'twould have taken sharper eyes than even Joyce Hatherleigh's

to tell the mommet from its master, seen thirty yards off through a screen of leaves an' light, “Who's that up the tree?” axed the strange gal; an' “Cherry Ripe” bided quiet to see if Joyce would knaw t'wasn't he. But she thought 'twas, as her answer showed. “That's him,” she said, “my auld man. He be up in my tree pickin' fruit for me, no doubt.”

The fine young person giggled.

“I s'pose you'll have all the trees some day,” she said.

“Well, what then? I did ought to have something with the bargain, didn't I? I hope I shall have the trees, an' the cottage tu, an' at no very distant day neither.”

I lay theer weern't much coo an' cuddle in her voice when she said that; but the young person awnly giggled again.

“Is he very auld?” she axed; “he looks that funny up a tree!”

“Not so auld as I could wish,” said Joyce Hatherleigh; “but 'tis odds but I shall age un a bit come presently. The man's daft after me, an' so soon as we'm married—well, I've had my way always at home, an' I ban't

gwaine to give it up now for him. He'm a ugly auld hunks; but theer 'tis: a gal's a fule to quarrel wi' her bread an' butter. I must keep un on a chain so long as I can, an' hope I'll share cottage an' garden wi' a better man some day."

'Twas then that "Cherry Ripe" rose up out of the vegetable marrow an' looked awver, his face not two yards from the gals. What he said I can't repeat, because he was a man of very coarse expressions, best of times; an' now—wi' his gert love all curdled to poison at her cold speech—he forgot she was a female, an' forgot as theer was a fine young person from Exeter along wi' her, an' gived her such a douce of a dressin' down as never a maiden got all to wance afore. The plain, stark-naked truth he told her; an' he figured her up dead right in that speech—right to a hair. Then he went in his house, and the gal, as had turned sick wi' fright at suddenly seein' two "Cherry Ripes"—blue muzzle an' all—got sick wi' rage afore he'd done speakin'; an' if her blue eyes could have struck the man dead, dead he'd have dropped, for sure.

But, as I say, he figured her up true to the bottom of her bad heart, an' if I doan't know—what be talking to 'e now—who should know? For I'm the chap Geof Youngling; an' she comed to me wi' a lyin' tale arter he thrawed her awver; an' by the time I heard the truth from Isaac Ash, which he told me two year later, after we had quarrelled, I was married to the woman. My wife she weer for three-an'-thirty years; an' a worse wan never man had, though I say it; for theer ban't no law brought in yet against tellin' the truth about a party after they'm gone, thank God—though 'tis a dangerous offence while they'm livin'.

A WITCH

'TWAS among them things "we have heard with our ears an' our faithers have tawld us," in Scripture phrase; an' my own gran'faither 'twas as tawld me, an' if he didn't knaw the rights of it, who should?

Mother Tabitha Loney lived uplong, out Metherrill way, wheer the fir woods rise above the river; an' theer, just 'bout the time Queen Victoria comed to the throne, she flourished like the green bay tree—a sprig o' the devil's awn planting tu. Mother Tab, as she weer most times called for shortness behind her back, was a black witch that never done a gude deed in man's memory. She bided up to her cot daytime, an' lived by beggin', for never beggar got what she wanted quicker. 'Twas regular

blackmail she put on the folks, an' yet, arter the matter of Farmer Slocombe, nobody dared to say her nay.

Slocombe, he was by way of bein' a Bible man through thick an' thin, an' reckoned the Witch of Endor's awn self wouldn't have shook a sixpence out of him; so he gives Mother Tab a short answer. Gran'faither was workin' theer at the time, an' seed it all.

"Get you gone, in the name o' the Lard, you hookem-snivey auld witch!" sez Slocombe.

"So be it, Robert Slocombe," she answers back. "If I *be* a witch you'll know it 'fore the next rise of sun." Then she spits 'pon the airth twice, and shaakes both her fistes at Slocombe, an' away she goes.

Very same night farmer's hayrick caught fire; but he said 'twas along of savin' the hay tu quick. An' a fortnight later he lost four bullocks what went astray an' ate poison. Still Slocombe would have it 'twas nothing against nature. An' then he took ill hisself wi' burn-gout, as laid un by the heels for more'n a month, an' tormented him shockin' cruel. Doctor said 'twas the worry

of mind an' the frettin' his guts to fiddle-strings awver his losses; but he knawed better, an' thraved up the sponge, an' sent for Mother Tab, an' gived her a five-shillin' piece, an' reckoned henceforth that the Bible weern't strong enough for such a witch as she—not in a layman's hand, anyway.

As to the house she lived in, 'twas a two-room cottage wi' thatched roof an' awpen hearth for peat. Clean as a new pin, 'twas reported, but stamped wi' the stamp o' dark ways. Gran'faither, as was a man whose word could be relied 'pon to wi'in five year of his death, when he grawed tootlish, seed the spot. 'Pon the walls of un was a row o' the bones out of a bullock's back. For all the world like li'l' squat devils they be, wi' a flat nose, an' ears, an' mouth, an' eyes. Then a black goat you'd see, fastened inside the garden, an' the woman grawed strange plants theer for her awn evil ends. Inside, across a roof beam, she'd strung a reg'lar devil's peepshow o' dark things. A skeleton of a snake she had, an' the carcass of a toad, an' a cat's mummy hanging backside upwards. Also birds' eggs threaded 'pon a

rush—what be things of gert power in a witch's hands ; an' more'n wan bottle wi' a eft in't ; an' gert bunches of simples—mostly poisons, I reckon. Theer might have been scores o' dozens o' cats, gran'faither said—black, white, an' brindled. An' that minds me of Keeper Medland, what had the worst of a deal wi' Mother Tab 'bout them very beasts. A North Devon man him, an' he got appointed gamekeeper to Squire Yeoland when old Morgan died. He soon found that them cats was breedin' in the preserves like the children of Israel, an' he comes down on the witch, gun in hand, an' tells her that he'm gwaine to shoot at sight every cat an' kitling he sees outside her cottage wall.

“Do it at your peril!” she sez ; an' he done it, an' shot an auld ram cat that very night, an' nailed un up 'pon the keeper's gallows in the wood, wi' the fern owls, an' hawks, an' wants,* and such-like varmint. But the cat vanished off that board 'fore Medland comed round again, an' next October theer was a big poachin' raid made

* Wants=moles.

'pon the pheasants by a gang as Saul Coaker got together, an' lost his life by it. An' keeper he got his right arm broke, an' was desperate sick for weeks an' weeks. What I sez is, theer ban't no runnin' from facts like that. An' many other just persons she awverluded same way.

A lean, berry-brown auld woman wi' sloe-black eyes, an' a man's voice, an' man's hair 'pon her lip, so my gran'faither said. She dressed in black, an' wore gawld of a heathen pattern in her ears, an' her hands was allus movin' an' wrigglin' an' makin' signs, as though she was talkin' to some dark thing, dumb an' invisible. But for all her evil eye the creature had a darter, by name Margery Loney, a maid wi' as little of the witch 'bout her to outward seemin' as any honest man's darter in Little Silver.

Mother Tab had warts on her face wi' tags o' grey grawin' out o' 'em, an' her eye-brows was so ragged as a hedge as wants tackin', an' her breast flat as an ironin'-board—built for flyin' she was, I reckon; but the gal 'peared to be proper Eve's flesh, I assure 'e—not by no means purty, but a

kind faace, an' a soft voice, an' a round bosom, an' a gude heart in it. Gran'faither never did think theer was any harm in her, no more did Bill Collins, a chap as worked wi' gran'faither to Slocombe's farm. Bill— an' 'tis 'bout him as I'm gwaine to tell 'e— got to knaw Margery Loney this way. His work took un for six weeks together up to the edge o' the Moor. Theer he was sifting gravel from a pit — 'cause Slocombe had Wenwill rights, an' might taake whatsoever he pleased from Dartymoor as could do un gude, 'cordin' to the auld writings. An' workin' in a spot far distant from any habitations, theer comed Margery Loney, autumn time, pickin' hurts, or, as you'd say, bilberries, along the edge o' the gravel-pit.

“Taaake care what be 'bout theer, gal,” sez Collins.

“You mind your awn business, young man,” sez Margery pleasant-like.

So they comed to knaw wan another.

A wisht life hers—lonely as a yellow-hammer. An' meetin' wi' Bill brought some sunshine into it, for he was a hand-

some man, straight in the back, an' wi' gert muscles on un like a tiger.

They grawed friendly, met awften, an' seed a deal of each other in the gravel-pit. Gran'faither went uplong once hisself an' gave it as his view as Margery was a bowerly maid. She weer a changelin', my gran'faither reckoned; but the blood in her nobody ever knawed, for though, of coorse, a human gal, some said she was no more Mother Tab's darter than you be; an' she reckoned she weern't herself, for she had a mighty wonnerful story she used to tell Bill 'bout bein' a gen'leman's child put away wi' Mother Loney for a gen'leman's reasons.

It comed out the day my awn gran'faither was up to the gravel-pit. Margery bringed Bill a bit o' rabbit-pie what she'd cooked for un herself while auld witch was out the way; an' my gran'faither he had some tu, an' the girl watched 'em eat wi' her grey eyes, glad to see 'em set such gude appetites to the pie.

"You'm mighty differ'nt to your mother, Margery," sez Bill.

"Ess fay," sez my gran'faither.

An' then she flushes so pink as the marsh mally flowers, an' ups and sez—

"No mother of mine, I do assure 'e. None at all. God, He knaws wheer them as bred me be. An' what I say be true, Bill Collins, for the auld woman tawld me so herself, bein' in liquor wan night."

"That's the time for truth—when a poor sawl's half seas awver," sez gran'faither.

"An' so it be," answers the gal. "My father was a gen'leman, an' Mother Loney cussed un that night an' cussed me, an' wished as I was off her hands; an' I wish wi' my heart an' sawl I was, for she ban't nothin' to me, an' I ban't nothin' to she. An' I hates the very sight of the venomous twoad."

Then Collins he wrinkles up his red forehead an' scratches in his thin, sand-coloured beard an' sighs. An' my gran'faither said he knawed the meanin' of that sigh. 'Cause he was a married man hisself, an' had been through courtin' an' keepin' comp'ny an' all the rest of they coorious fooleries as goes before marriage.

Two days later Bill comes up to gran'-

faither lookin' pea-green 'bout the gills, an' so mazed as a sheep.

"I've done it," he sez.

"Done what?" sez gran'faither.

"Axed Mother Loney's maid to taake me," sez Collins.

"I lay she did," sez gran'faither.

"Ess fay, an' she did," sez Collins. "I axed her if she'd keep comp'ny along wi' me an' be tokened for marriage come my wages goes up; an' she cried. Then I said as I was a man as stood to work, an' would make a tidy snug home. An' she—weel, theer, it ban't no business of yourn, as I can see," sez Collins to my gran'faither. "Anyway, 'tis as it should be, an' you can give me joy if you mind to." Which, in coorse, my gran'faither done, an' hoped 'twould be fust a gal, then a bwoy, 'cordin' to the polite fashion of them days.

An' theer the matter stood, an' I reckon Bill bringed no small happiness into the lot of that poor, forsaken gal; an' she was all the world to him, an' they counted to be wed next fall, the time bein' spring when they was tokened final.

If that auld cat had awnly died or been knocked 'pon the head for her sins! But she lived on, doubtless for some dark purpose o' God A'mighty; she lived on', an' every man's mouth was full of her wickedness, an' her page in the judgment-book grawed thunder-black, I reckon. But the devil's got a tender hand wi' his awn. The wicked auld bag o' bones prospered, so far as wan could see—prospered an' comed by money reaped out o' the fear of her betters—Christian men an' women as you might have said would knaw differ'nt. An' yet facts is facts, an' for my paart I'm awnly 'mazin' thankful to God that such women ban't 'pon the Moor now. Railways done a power o' gude 'gainst witches, I reckon, for they caan't stand 'gainst machinery an' steam power, as is purty generally allowed.

Well, Collins an' the gal, Margery, made gude auld-fashioned lovers, an' grawed dear each to t'other so natural as a story-book. He was a proper sort of man, an' her a tidy maid, if plain, an' well thought 'pon by those who knawed her. She begged an' prayed of Bill to name the day, for never gal had

better cause than her to seek a home of her awn. Awfullest things, 'tis said, as she tawld her lover 'bout what went on in Mother Loney's cottage night time; an' though my gran'faither never 'zactly heard tell as the witch was seed by Margery a-gwaine up the chimney to meet her master along wi' a broomstick an' a screech-owl, that ban't to say no such thing never happened; for Bill heard a deal more from Margery than ever he tawld again, an' a deal more'n he liked, for that matter.

Then comed the trouble with Farmer Slocombe as I've tawld 'e 'bout. Bill was standing by when Mother Tab spat 'pon the airth afore the farmer, an' next day he heard tell what she done when she went home, 'cause Margery tawld un, an' he tawld gran'faither.

Witch, she come home in a strammin' gert passion, an' cussed Slocombe's skin off his bones; then she went 'mong her devilries, an' just when the moon comed up round awver the Moor, an' lightened up Teign river wi' sparks o' silver, she popped out in the garden an' bid Margery watch

her. Then she took three black twoads, an' cut her finger an' dropped wan drop of her wicked blood 'pon the head of each varmint. An' then she said words as Margery didn't knaw the value of, an' took them twoads wan by wan outside where the moon was silverin' the airth. Then she said to 'em, "Get you gone, you li'l' devils, an' do my business." An' away they all hopped in the dark, sprightlier than any twoads ever Margery seed afore. Then, after the spell was done, Mother Tab turned to Margery an' said, "Now you've seed what you've seed, an' you can tell Bill Collins what you've seed if he axes 'e, an' he'll tell the farmer."

So, presently, when Bill met Margery wi' a terrible coorious story 'bout the burnin' of the hayrick, she gived un chapter an' verse for it, an' made un scratch his head as never he scratched it afore.

"I thought 'twas awver - heatin' of the hay through being piled tu soon," said Bill; "but now you tell this here, I be gormed if I can say as I knaws what to think."

But when other troubles came tumblin'

'pon Slocombe, theer weern't room for two opinions, in a manner of speakin', an' Margery she beganned to share a little of the black hate as went out from every honest heart against the witch. For theer 'twas, whether her cheel or not her cheel, Margery lived to the cottage in the wood, an' knawed of the night-hid doings an' dark spells an' such-like as went on theer.

'Twas that as Bill's mother pointed out to un, an' she was a gude mother an' him a gude son as sons go; an' she went down on her bended knees to un times wi'out count to be off wi' the girl, calling the Lard of Hosts to her witness that no gude could come of marryin' along wi' a black witch's darter. But when was the man as listened to his mother 'bout the marryin' job? Bill was stout for her, though my gran'faither sez he had plenty uneasy moments here an' theer. Awnly when he seed Margery, the clouds cleared off un an' he'd say sometimes as he didn't care if she was the devil's darter, she was gude enough for him—tu gude, for that matter.

So he held out for her just as his master

held out 'gainst Mother Tab ; but then, when Slocombe got burn-gout in his foot, an' gave up fightin' an' gived the damned auld witch five shillin' to let un alone—then Collins took thought again an' grew glum as a bear wi' a sore head, for who was he to knaw better'n his master ?

It shook the sawl of un, an' I do b'lieve as no poor day-labourer ever wrastled harder wi' his love an' his conscience ; but theer 'twas—wan gal against all the parish ; an' all the parish got the best of it an' wrenched them two sawls apart.

So Collins thraved her awver, an' let on as he didn't believe in God no more that such things could be ; an' his mother, on the other hand, blessed God on her knees day an' night for a month, reckoning as her son was saved alive. 'Tis accordin' to the way you looks at the coil which was right ; an' for my paart I be mighty sorry for the gal so awften as I mind the tale.

They had a purty sad scene, them two, when he tawld her he was gwaine to break their bargain. She prayed un by the holy saints not to give her up ; she sweared she

was so innocent of any sort of wickedness as the dumb flowers in the hedge an' the ferns unfolding. She cried loud an' long to un, an' called the God of the whole airth to strike her dead on the heather uplong if ever she'd said a crooked word or thought a crooked deed against man, woman, or cheel; an' she tawld un as he was all she'd got to love in a cold world. My gran'faither heard, you mind, from Collins hisself when he comed home awver-full wi' the poor, lonely gal's gert sorrow. Ess fay, she wept salt tears that noon an' clinged to the man, as was the whole airth an' the fulness theerof to her. "Christ knaws how I hardened my heart against her," Bill sez to my gran'faither, "but I done it, though I couldn't see straight at partin' from her. I done it, an' left her uplong against the daylight on the heather ridges, standing still as a stone, she weer. An' I," sez Bill, "I got back to the village an' dranked myself beastlier drunk than ever I done afore."

'Twas theer in the story that Mother Tab comed in so strong, dratted auld hell-cat as she was, if you'll pardon the crooked words.

She'd been mighty set 'pon Margery's matin' wi' Bill, 'cause it meant as Margery would be out of her way, an' she'd have another plaace wheer she could allus count upon money an' food. So when she heard tell he'd chaanged his tune, she nigh bust herself wi' wickedness, an' set to work to do a blacker sin than ever she'd done yet.

A month it might be after Bill brawk off wi' his gal, Margery met un on the high Moor, an' her face was white as curds an' full of gert news as he could see. He'd grown wild an' weak of late, said good-bye to gude report an' decent livin', cussed his mother in the awpen street, as gossips heard, an' was spendin' his savin's round about in the public-houses, havin' no further use for 'em. An' Margery seed the change in un an' comed up an' clutched hold his arm an' prayed un if ever he loved her to bide wan li'l' moment and give heed to what she'd got to tell un.

Which he done, an' heard a terrible gashly story tu. Comin' home two nights afore, Margery looked in the window of her house an' seed Mother Tab at some new devilries,

an' bided wheer she stood an' listened an' glazed wi' all her eyes. Witch she'd drawed a black ring 'pon the ground wi' charcoal an' sticked a 'bullock's heart in the midst of it. In the heart she'd shoved horse-shoe nails to shape the letter "C," an' outside the circle, in a frying-pan, or some such thing, she'd got a gert blaze of stinkin' stuff burnin' so red as a auld moon when it do rise up after midnight. Her was babblin' some outlandish jargon at the top of her voice, an' the blasted cats, either feared of the fire, or else 'cause they was more'n common cats an' knawed what she was doin', weer hollerin' like a cargo o' demons let loose. 'Twas the aw-fullest screechin', so Margery tawld Bill, an' he tawld my gran'faither, as ever stunned a pair o' human ears. /

Then out of the babble o' heathen cusses the gal caught a name, an' that name was "William Collins"; an' fearin' nought for herself, poor creature, she rushed in an' shrieked out louder'n the witch's self an' axed her what she meant wi' that name on her lips. Wi'out sayin' nothing Mother Tab just pointed 'pon the airth, an' Margery

seed as in her haste she'd run right in the black charcoal circle an' was standin' in it that instant moment.

Then witch speaks, an' sez how she'd drawed the circle against Bill Collins to his undoin', an' how as Margery would share the ill of the man she loved because she'd walked through the circle 'fore the spell was cool. "Grave-meat you'll be, both of 'e, 'fore you'm a year aulder," says that evil witch to her; an' the gal cared little enough for herself, but awnly feared for the man, an' reckoned to save him if she could. Fust she begged an' prayed Mother Tab to lift the curse off un, an' offered her body an' bones in exchange for his; but the hag said as 'twas out of her power to call back the deed. Then Margery seed Bill, as I've told 'e, an' laid the whole come-along-of-it afore him.

'Twasn't much he said in answer, but he never lifted a finger against his fate, an' grawed sheer mad from that day onward. The gal had begged of un to fly the plaace, judgin' if he got far ways off, the poison of the witch would never reach to un;

but he just looked the thing in the faace, an' went down afore it as if 'twas an angel from heaven had forewarned un. Yet 'twas only a limb of t'other place actin' against him, an' I wouldn't say to this day but if he'd seeked parson an' tackled his trouble wi' psalms an' hymns an' the Word o' God but he might have bested her even then. Still he didn't. He just tried to hearten up the gal, an' said as what must be must be, an' took a desperate way, like a man knawin' hissself doomed by doctor's decree. Nothin' as his friends could do was strong enough to steady him. He becomed a renowned dangerous character, I assure 'e, an' took to the drink an' got turned off by Slocombe, who said if he was bent on gwaine to the devil, he must go somewheers else than 'pon his farm. From bein' a gude, self-respectin' chap, he sinked dirt low under the blight of the cuss, an' got out to elbows 'fore the end of it all, an' brawk purty near his mother's heart so well as Margery Loney's.

Then, wan night, an' in drink no doubt at the time, he falled in the river coming

home-along to Little Silver, and he brawked his leg an' was took to hospital to be mended. But heal un they couldn't—not the braavest bone-setter among 'em—for the cuss it fastened on Bill's leg like a dog on a rat; an' all manner of the frightfulest calamities set in, an' arisepalis—or some such dark-named ill—wi' the rest. So it falled out that the circle drawed against poor Collins weern't planned for nothin', 'cause he died.

But theer's so bad again to tell, for Margery Loney wi'in a little month of Bill's buryin' cut her awn thread—the poor daft creature—an' flinged herself in Teign, down below Lee Bridge, Chaggyford way, wheer theer's deep hovers an' 'tis so lonely by night as the desert of Egypt. They found her drowned, an' some was for buryin' her at a cross-road, 'cordin' to the rough ways of old, but some reckoned not, so they didn't do it; an' some cried out to go up along an' try what that damned witch was made of as had cut short two young lives in this bowldacious fashion.

But what comed of Mother Tab in the

upshot my gran'faither never knawed, though 'tis easy to guess she made a bad end sooner or late an' went to fire an' brimstone at her appointed time.

That's the tale, anyhow; an' how much be accordin' to the ordinary workings of nature, an' how much be 'cordin' to black art an' magic, 'twould take a darned sight more learned headpiece than mine to tell 'e.

THE BEST OF THREE FALLS

I

'TIS a tale generally reckoned worth telling to them as mayn't have heard it. An' naming that anointed old witch Tabitha Loney do put me in mind of the story, though her had nought to do wi' it.

Avis Easterbrook was darter of Farmer Easterbrook to Craber. A stiff-necked man, as married the wrong wife for his sins, though sartainly Heaven forgived un an' took the woman to glory afore her time. In fact she died when Avis was born, an' the husband, as found one bit of matrimony more'n enough, never looked at a female again, though many looked at him. The gal grewed up the very daps of her mother an' had a bit of her disposition also. She were purty as a painted picksher, but given to vain

imaginings here an' theer—felt drawed to poetry books an' such vanities, an' had a liking for fairy stories an' the auld wisht tales of the Moor wi' ghostes in 'em if no worse. But she was a restful gal compared to her mother, an' had a shorter tongue; an' she grawed into a likely wench, as all agreed, wi' a li'l' faace so red as apple-blossom afore it blows; a pair of eyes grey an' shinin', like the fog 'pon the Moor when the sunlight be catched in it; an' on-coming shape also; an' 'a fuzzy poll o' dark curls. Coorse the young fellows soon beganned a buzzin' round her like bees in spring crocuses; but she weern't no ways easy to win, I warn 'e. Modest an' shy, an' happiest at her faither's side, as a gal should be.

Now I must go back a bit. Touching that farm of Easterbrook's, by name of Craber, 'twas as good land as you'll find anywheres 'pon the edge of the heather. An' the head man was Sampson Clegg—a very strange piece, to be sure. A ancient veteran man was Sampson, wi' a funny life behind un an' so full of mystery as an egg of meat. A dark man, you mind, as had passed

for a white witch in his day, an' showed up many a black un. For when a black witch did awverlook or bewitch a body, or send the anbury to turmut, or the rot to sheep, 'twas the custom in the auld days to seek out a wise man or woman an' get a spell stronger'n the wicked wan. But who was white an' who was black might have puzzled the Dowl's self to say now an' again. Awnly, as a good general rule, the females was black, like auld witch Tabitha Loney, an' did mischief out o' natural wickedness; an' the males—such as Sampson Clegg—was white, an' worked against 'em, for money.

But a many wonnerful things happened 'pon Dartymoor fifty year ago as wouldn't suit your nice ears to b'lieve now. Anyway Clegg knawed more'n he confessed to, an' was very deep versed in spells an' charms for inflammations an' burn-gout an' sprains an' troubles to man an' beast. He could make a cow drop a sparkled calf, an' let a woman have a bwoy or a cheel 'cordin' as she wanted; an', contrariwise, when Mother Mundy, as be long dead now, poor awvertaxed sawl, offered un a gawlden ten shillin'

bit if he'd stop her from any more child-bearin'—her having eight an' wan onder-ground up to that time—he wouldn't take the money, having a grudge against the woman's husband, so 'twas reported. An' her bore two more arter that, then died; which'll show 'e the bitter power of the man; an' though he gived up such unholy things in his green age, an' made so good an end as you or me will onder Parson Smedley's own eyes, yet 'twas differ'nt wi' un aforetime.

I name Clegg 'cause in a fashion he've got so much to do wi' the tale as Avis herself have.

As I was saying, the young youths flinged many a sheep's eye the way Avis went. But it growed to be a general idea after a time that Farmer Easterbrook would make up her mind for her, an' that the gal would never let her heart go wheer his head didn't second. So us settled down to receive the idea that Willie Baker, son of Sexton Baker, was the man. 'Cause, though the son of sexton, he was a chap as had come in for a very nice little farm, down in the country to Sandypark, through a uncle of his mother.

An' Easterbrook liked un well; an' Avis didn't dislike un; an' though there was no walking out to our knowledge, yet Will often spent Sunday up to Craber.

Then t'other cropped up. Mark Ford he was, a Drewsteignton man by birth. But he'd been out in the world, nobody knowed wheer, for fifteen year. An' coming back sudden, he found his folks was mostly dead. Then he took a cottage to Little Silver an' played the gentleman, though wheer his money comed from an' the depth of his pocket none knowed. For looks you'd have said Willie Baker was easy first. He stood six foot in his socks, an' had shoulders like a bullock, an' a very honest God-fearin' disposition with it. T'other weern't so big, though he 'peared well put together, but he never talked to 'e an' looked between your eyes like Willie done. Mark Ford was much given to gals; an' he had a way some men has with women, an' some wi' dogs. I myself can make another man's dog walk arter me just same as if 'twas my awn; but, thank God, I never held such a power awver another man's woman; an' I'm sure I

wouldn't use it if I had. Mark Ford could, however, though whether it was mesmerism, or the devil, I couldn't tell 'e. He had a sleepy sort of eye, an' short curly hair, an' a lazy smile. Not that he'd talk much to the gals, yet he'd be speakin' some damn lingo out of his sulky, sleepy eyes all the time. He'd give a queer twitch at wan corner of his mouth at 'em, an', to make a long story shorter, he'd maze most any girl he wanted to.

An' so he did Avis Easterbrook. His faither an' hers had knawed each other in past times; an' he often comed to Craber Farm an' brawk bread theer; but never did he say much about his life. Awnly he dropped by words, spread awver many tellings, that he'd seen the Indies an' other fantastical plaaces beyond sea; so he was set down for a sailor man, though he'd never actually said he was.

Easterbrook didn't like un at all, no more did Sampson Clegg, but Avis—be blessed if her weern't a reed in the wind afore un. She—as never could abide a man, an' wouldn't even pluck spirit to say “Yes”

to Willie Baker, though he'd axed twice by now—rose up into a strong masterful fool of a woman onder Ford's left-handed magic. In six weeks she worshipped the chap; an' they was seen pickin' primrosen in the spring, an' eatin' wood-strawberries in lonely plaaces come summer.

Till then, Avis Easterbrook hadn't been exactly unfriendly to Willie; but her was just flickering 'pon the point of giving in, as her faither reckoned, an' was tu wise to hurry her; but now Baker found hisself very much out in the cold, an' a quarrel falled out between Mr. Easterbrook an' his darter consarning Mark Ford. Then the sailor seed farmer an' axed if he might court Avis open an' regular, an' auld man gived un a short answer.

Theer it rested till late autumn, an' then by chance Willie an' Ford runned up against one another. Each knawed t'other man by sight though they never spoke, but now, coming home along from Moreton, they met an' had a tell 'bout what was in both their minds. I heard it from Baker hisself arter, so theer's no manner of doubt, though I'd

never have credited what they said if I hadn't larned it from a man so straight as he was.

"Be it true, then," axes Ford, sarcastic like, "that you'm forcin' yourself on a gal as have promised to marry me?"

An' Baker looks down from his hoss, being a fiery man, an' sez, "Since you'm pleased to put it that way, 'tis true; an' I hopes to marry Avis Easterbrook yet, come she gets a pinch of sense in her head."

"That's how you talk of a gal to her awn sweetheart, is it? You must know blamed little 'bout women. S'pose I tell her your hope?"

"Tell her an' welcome. May waken sense in her. She liked me very well afore you comed, an' may again presently."

"You fancies your chance still, do 'e? I should have thought you was tu much of a man to force yourself 'pon the maid if her's changed her mind."

Will chewed 'pon that speech for a while. Then he said—

"If us wasn't 'zactly tokened to wed, 'twas next thing to it. She's like what any

other young maiden gal might be: not tu ready to part wi' her freedom to a husband; but her was coming to it. I'd filled her eye for three year an' more; an' I was very well content to bide patient for such a prize as her."

"But now she've changed her mind, you see," sez the chap on foot.

"I doan't set tu much store by that," answers Willie in his cool way. "You knawed about me an' her afore you stepped in; so you'm a bit of a knave, come to think of it. An', to tell honest truth, I ban't gwaine for to be pushed on wan side by the likes of you."

"But you have been," answered t'other. "Your candle's out, an' 'tis more'n you'll do, or Farmer Easterbrook either, to light it again."

Willie Baker he said no more, an' kept his mouth shut so long that t'other got tired o' jawin' to a man who 'peared to be so dumb an' cheerful as they grinning stone devils 'pon the church rain-shoots. He tried his best to sting Baker into a passion by crowing over him, but he couldn't; so then

he axed un calm what he thought about it.

Then Willie answers him, slow an' thoughtful like.

"I be wondering if 'twould lessen 'e in her mind if I was to give 'e a brave gude hiding."

Ford's eyes they sparkled, like red-hot iron 'pon an anvil, when he heard t'other say that. He was a tidy broad man tu, mind, an' awnly a year or two aulder than Baker.

Then Willie spoke again.

"If I was to vang into 'e an' make you go black an' blue for a month o' Sundays, it might open her eyes perhaps, seeing what females are."

"I doubt it would," said Ford, lookin' up quiet an' wicked at Willie as he rode along upon his gert hoss; "an' 'tis coorious you should say that, for I've had it in my mind also. If I was to wallop 'e to the truth of moosic, as the saying is, Avis Easterbrook might see that for all your big body and bones, an' big voice likewise, theer weern't so much for 'e to boast about.

The female goes to the stronger male in nature; an' ban't a bad rule, neither, for happiness so well as breeding, I reckon."

Baker laughed at that.

"'Struth!" he said. "You! I could eat 'e raw, an' want my dinner arter."

"Let's talk sense, not fulishness," sez Ford. "I judge you'm three inches or four better'n me, wi' two stone to the good also. I'll throw that in if you'll let it be wrastling 'stead o' fighting."

"Why, you zany, that's all solid to the gain o' me! I could throw 'e across the river."

"I know you'm best man in these parts. Yet—would 'e stake the gal on your cleverness, or be feared to?" axes Ford, licking his lips as though he was hungry.

"I'd stake my sawl on it, for that matter," answers Willie, who knawed hissself for the best man in the South Hams.

"Best o' three falls?" sez Ford.

"Ess fay, if you can stand to me arter the fust one."

"Your trumpeter's gone dead, haven't 'e?" axes Ford, sneering-like. "Anyway

us will have it clear. If I thraws 'e twice, you'll give me best, an' tell Easterbrook you've changed your mind 'bout Avis?"

Then Willie looked at t'other careful, an' measured un, an' sized un up. Maybe if he hadn't been quite so sore wi' the gal just then, he'd have thought twice, seeing he knawed nought about Ford; awnly things being as they was, he decided pretty short, an' just said—

"So be it; an' if I fell you, you'll swear the same."

Mark Ford swore prompt. Never man swore prompter. Then comed the question where they should play. Willie wished it fair an' square 'fore judges an' a umpire; but other said he reckoned not, 'cause the beaten chap didn't want to be a laughing-stock ever arter. So Baker, as reckoned 'twas all over bar shouting, let un have his way; an' they settled place an' time, but told no man. 'Twas a mighty peaceful spot they chose, tu, an' as for lookers-on, harvest moon and the Lord would see 'em, but nought else.

II

There us can leave 'em for a few minutes an' go to Avis Easterbrook. You see, the girl was in a very tight place for any young female creature, an' a battle raged like in her heart between common sense on the one side an' love 'pon the other. Not as theer's any doubt how that fight goes most times; but in this case 'tweern't a ordinary fix Avis was in—else common sense would have been thraved overboard same as it allus is; but she loved young Baker tu. That was the onusual trouble. 'Tweern't she liked Willie less than before, I assure 'e; but she loved the sleepy-eyed chap more.

What with all this coil about them two men, an' sleepless nights, an' her faither allus bully-ragging her for her nonsense, an' neighbours' talk, an' wan thing an' another, Avis growed glumpy and glowry. The worrit catched her nerves cruel, made her right down ill, an' brought on a raging face-ache. But in coorse 'twas fore-ordained,

as all things be, down to the shooting of a corn afore damp weather.

So it falled out that, sitting nursing her cheek, by the fire in the kitchen at Craber, Avis seed Sampson Clegg come in, an' axed un, half in earnest, half in jest, what was good for the pain.

"Doctor's stuff ban't making me no cleverer, seemin'ly," she said, "though he promised 'twas bound to cure the face-ache if I gived it full time."

"Ban't face-ache," answers Sampson in his blunt fashion way; "'tis toothache."

"Never," answered the gal, an' showed un teeth so purty as a li'l' pearly necklace. "Theer's nought there as can ache," she said; but Clegg wouldn't be argued with.

"Toothache, though you may not see the hurt," he said; "an' a cure theer is outside of all doctor's muck. Only ban't for maidens. They haven't courage for to use it."

"Then 'tis something as hurts cruel, I lay," said Avis.

"Not it," he telled her. "You wants brains in your head, that's all, an' a sensible

understanding, an' a pinch o' faith. 'Tis the lack of that last as spoils half the cures we sets out to minister to human ills, be they small, or be they great."

"Best to let me have it, anyway, Sampson," Avis replied, "'cause you may be right, an' I knows you've got a many strange cures in your head—things as spoil if once set down in written words."

That pleased the old man, an' he nodded cheerful-like.

"'Tis a warranted sovereign cure," Clegg promised her, "an' worth a sovereign, for that matter, though 'tis yours for nought. I awnly wish I'd knawed it sooner myself," he sez, "for then my teeth would be in brave working still, 'stead of the ramshackle, out-at-elbows lot you see 'em. But I only heard tell of the cure thirty year ago; then it was tu late to do aught."

"Do 'e please tell me what 'tis," she said.

"I'll tell 'e an' welcome, but you'll never carry it out. 'Tis just this: you must go down-long to the burying-ground, an' rummage 'mong they bones Sexton Baker keeps under a big slate nigh the vestry door. He

digs 'em up now an' again, for theer's a many more buried to Little Silver than theer's mounds to; an' the right relic be theer just now, I know, unless he's buried un since. Anyway I seed it theer a month ago. 'Tis a human death's head; an' you must take it in your hands an' pull a tooth out of its jaw in the name of the Faither, Son, an' Ghost. Ess, that you must do, missy—on a bright, moony night, for choice, wi'out help from man, woman, or child. An' the tooth must be wrapped in two wisps o' sheep's wool picked off the thorns by the wayside—wan white, wan black. An' so long as you keep that charm saved up, never the leastest twinge of toothache will you have more."

"Caan't be true, Sampson; 'tis tu simple," said Avis.

An' then he snorted in his wrath against her.

"You'm like the fool of a king what reckoned his own brook was good enough for washing in, when prophet told un to dip in another. 'Tis just the simple deeds as want faith, I reckon, not the big uns. How-

ever, go your ways, an' doan't say I didn't tell 'e."

"S'pose I shouldn't meet with the horrid thing?" she axed.

"You will," he said. "You will if you seek in proper plaace. Baker keeps 'em wheer he keeps his tools in that little slate chamber he's fashioned. An' I do think darkly that he uses 'em now an' again to fat his land, an' scatters 'em over his cabbage plot by night. Else how is it his green-stuffs took fust prize three years runnin' to Chaggyford Cottage Show? Not that I'd say it in the open street, being a libel, yet I seem 'tis true."

"I'll screw up my courage and do as you say, Sampson."

"Better'n that quacksalver as draws teeth Mondays an' Fridays to Chaggyford, half a crown a time, anyway," replies Clegg to her.

So they made an end o' telling 'bout it, an' I lay you'll guess what fell out next. Everybody do.

Now them men had thought of the churchyard as peace fullest spot handy for both, wi' good footing, an' out o' the way

of the world. Nice open ground, tu, alongside Saul Coaker's grave, and no other mounds theer for the moment but his.

To 'em sure enough, close 'pon midnight, under a butivul clear sky, comed Avis, trippin' like a moon fairy, wi' her heart in a flutter; but as she slipped around the tower buttress, be blessed if she didn't find company!

A gert ink-black shadow hid her wheer she bided, an' t'others was a lot tu busy to know theer was anybody so nigh; but she seed them, an' watched 'em, all eyes an' beatin' heart, as they swayed, an' struggled, an' gasped, an' grunted in the full silver of the moon.

They was just in holds when she fust got theer; an' I doan't doubt she had sight of some play so purty as any man might wish to see; but 'tweern't no joy to her, I assure 'e, for Avis knowed wi'out telling that them chaps wasn't wrastlin' 'mongst graves in the middle of the night for fun.

As to the ackshual play, I heard all about it arterwards from Willie Baker. Ford comed sharp to time, an' everything was right an' reg'lar. Fust bout lasted a matter

of four minutes or less, so far as Willie could judge, an' he mighty soon found as he'd met a better hand than he bargained for. But he was sweet on his own chance still; an' just begunned to feel the weight of his man, when sudden, an' quicker'n lightning, he found hisself gone, fair an' square—a clean fall wi' both shoulders 'pon the airth. An' t'other chap on his wind, like a sack of coals.

“How the hell you done that?” gurgles out Baker so soon as he could speak; for he knew right well as he'd been felled with a thraw he never heard tell of afore in his life.

“I'll show 'e again,” sez Ford, girning wicked under the moonlight. “I'll show 'e again; an' that'll be the best o' three. To think theer was anything you didn't know 'bout wrastlin'—such a wonnerful man as you!”

But he couldn't get Willie's monkey up, though he sneered at un cruel; for the man knowed he was a fall to the bad, an' also knowed what comes quick to the wrastler whose temper be gone. But his blood

grawed hot all the same, an' seeing t'other had a unknown fall, Willie reckoned he'd best to go on a differ'nt tack, an' use his extra strength an' weight for all 'twas worth while it would tell most. You may not have wrestled in your time, but you can take it from me that theer's nought more apt to make a body lose heart than the sure knowledge t'other man's cleverer'n what you be.

Next time, then, Willie Baker sailed in might an' main, thraved everything he knawed into the fust two minutes, an' wrestled that gigantic fierce that when he got wheer he wanted, Ford had to go, else his backbone must have been broke like a carrot. 'Twas just then, 'fore the last spell, they spoke a word or two; an' Avis, who kept out o' sight, heard all they said, an' grasped hold of the truth. I lay she'd forgot her tooth-ache an' her death's-head long ago.

They stood up for the decider; an' Ford he was cunning as a snake to keep out o' harm's way an' not be catched nappin'; an' Willie, wiring in again same as before, got thraved, so near as damn it, by the selfsame

hitch as had grassed un afore. But he just escaped, an' pushed for it wi' all his strength, knowing the hidden danger. 'Twas terrible heavy work, an' both felt what hanged to it. Next theer comed a scramblin' fall wi'out much advantage to either, an' neither could get t'other's shoulders fair down to airth. They wriggled in the usual way, an' the gal, knowin' little about it, reckoned 'twas turning into a life or death business an' a sheer struggle as to who should choke the breath out of who. 'Twas 'which he should,' as we say, an' not a pin to choose. Then they separated, an' soon was at it again; an' then Willie knawed that he was beginning to wear the man out; an' Ford knawed it also, an' felt, after a little more, that the extra weight an' strength would see him beat. Then it was in the mess of the two strugglin' men as Avis, who'd forgot herself, an' creeped within five yards of 'em, saw a shiny streak o' naked steel twitter out like a shootin' star, an' knawed it for a knife. Coorse, loving Mark Ford best, or thinking as she did, the gal judged 'twas Willie held it, an' she rushed in on 'em, screeching

like a night-jar, an' called 'pon 'em to stop.

Poor twoad! 'Twas very ill fortune, sure enough. Ford, knawing hissself beat, got in a passion, let Willie throw him, an' just as he was gwaine down, clawed on to t'other wi' wan hand and drawed a little sailor-knife from his thigh with t'other. Though how the blazes he could wrastle wi' such a thing girt to un I caan't guess. But so he did, an' what might have falled out us caan't say. What did happen was that. Avis, rushin' to part 'em, got the dig meant for Willie Baker in her right breast.

A proper tantara! Avis screamed out an' went off fainting; Ford got on his legs again, grabbed his coat, an' runned for it wi' red murder 'pon his back as he reckoned; an' Baker was tore in two for half a second between gwaine arter the rascal an' stopping to look to the gal. But of course he kept his head an' stopped, an' picked up the poor maiden all covered wi' blood, an' feared her must be struck for death without a doubt, but couldn't know it till a doctor seed her.

Doctor Clack was only a youngster in

them days, just fresh from being a pupil to a very larned man at Exeter; an' he lived up the hill nigh the rectory house. There Baker carried Avis; an' 'twas found by-an'-by that her had escaped from death by a miracle. The knife had missed her life by a mere thought, so Doctor Clack said—by the gracious goodness o' God, 'cordin' to old Easterbrook. The shock throwed her 'pon her back for a good few weeks; then she comed to her purty self again, an' none the worse that any could see.

As for Mark Ford, nobody never heard tell of him again, an' theer's a matter of fifteen pound owin' against him at Chagford an' Little Silver to this day. 'Tweern't likely he was gwaine to stop an' square his debts wi' murder on his sawl. For all us can say he may hold hisself a murderer still, if he's yet living. The officers traced un to Plymouth, an' 'twas believed as he must have got to the docks an' shipped wi' some ocean-gwaine vessel. An' that proves he was a sailor, come to think on it. 'Tweern't the fust time Mark Ford had been upon the roarin' deep, for sartain; an' I lay his coward's con-

science kept un ugly company 'pon his night watches—if he'd got any conscience about un, that is.

An' Avis Easterbrook comed round ; an' that theer comical Willie said as she'd doubtless saved his life, an' axed her what she'd done it for. "Avis Easterbrook" I call her, but she've been Avis Baker this many an' many a year now. Never wanted no more cures for the toothache, I warn 'e ! But a very happy, peace-loving woman, an' not above usin' one of Sampson Clegg's charms now an' then on the quiet, when the childern's took queer an' Doctor Clack be out of the way.

TO GIGLET MARKET

ALL along o' Giglet Market to Ockington 'twas, an' them romantic young fools got theer way, in a manner o' speaking; an' Farmer Nymet he got his way tu. An' he was right, an' his daughter Sibella—but I'll tell 'e the tale, an' you can judge for yourself.

Theer was a chap by name of Ted Drake as farmed a li'l' plaace 'pon the Moor out Teign-head way, under Sittaford Tor—a poor, beggarly bit o' newtake an' a farmhouse an' shippons on it, all removed five mile from the sight of civilisation. Theer he lived, bein' an orphan, along wi' his auld gran'mother, who kept house for un, an' a labourer, an' a gal for the dairy. Ted swore an' said that he could prove as he comed in descent from Sir Francis Drake—the gertest

hero ever born in Devon. But Sir Francis or no Sir Francis, the Drakes of Honeyweather Farm—which was Ted's place—was a folk so feeble as coneys, an' allus had been within man's memory. An' Ted, last of his line, though a stiff an' stalwart fellow—stuggy, as we call it—in build an' temper, was faced wi' a hard uphill life on starved land. No position like, but more or less hand-to-mouth 'twas wi' un. Of course, the man was a mere cipher alongside such a well-to-do, snug party as Judah Nymet, of Nymets; yet even so high did Ted lift his eyes, an' Sibella Nymet, darter of the farmer, falled in love wi' un cruel; an' 'twas more'n her faither, or mother, or mother Church, in the shape of passon, could do to hammer sense into her. 'Twas the youth's curly head, an' bull-neck, an' berry-brown cheeks as the gal went moonstruck on; an' she, wi' her yellow hair an' red lips an' comely little shape, wonned his heart same way. Fire in both of 'em tu, no doubt, as folk seed in the event.

They courted unbeknawnst for nigh a year, then the thing comed to Farmer Nymet's

ear, an' Jimmy Yole 'twas as found it out, an' spoiled their secret sweetheartin', 'cordin' to his usual foul way. A very ill-favoured, beastly auld man was Yole. They'd pensioned un from the clay-works down to Shaugh, owing to his breakin' both knees in theer sarvice. But he'd got plenty legs left to travel 'pon bad errands for all that; an' he comed an' dwelt to Little Silver, an' crept about the place wi' his wicked ears flappin' for every coorious piece of news as might be in the wind. So keen as a hound he was for the smell of anything a bit strong. He sat 'pon a stone outside the village pound most times, chewin' tobacco; an' 'tis a sartain fact as he knawed some harm 'bout every man, woman, child, an' cat in the plaace, an' never hadn't a kind word to say for anybody 'pon God's airth 'cept hisself. He was a very ill-convenient person about a small village, I do assure 'e, an' but for his thin, crooked legs, as gived onder un, like a pair o' flails, many a chap would have dealt the swine a righteous clout 'pon the earhole, or else taken theer workin' boots to un, hobnails an' all.

Crooked Yole, as he was called most times, showed hisself a reg'lar ferret in the business of other folks, an' when he caught Sibella Nymet an' young Drake down to the river, love-makin' so innocent as bees makin' honey, he bide hid in a fuzz-brake an' watched 'em wi' his wicked jackdaw eyes; then away he went, all crutches an' clatter, to break the news to Farmer Nymet.

Never a chap limped five miles out o' pure spite to such poor purpose, for Nymet, with his short, dry manner an' gert power o' silence, was a just man, an' not so much as a mug o' harvester's cider did Yole get for his pains. Farmer heard un wi'out a word or a "thank you"; then, when Yole had done, he just tawld un to pick up his sticks an' his hat, an' gived un ezacally wan minute an' a half to get outside farmyard gate afore he loosed his dog. 'Twas a gert, hulkin' yellow beast of doubtful stock; but it had very determined opinions in the matter o' tramps an' bagmen, an' such lop-sided, ugly fashion pictures as Crooked Yole made upon a path. The man heard

a chain rattle, an' knawed how famous Judah Nymet was for keepin' his word; so he used a cuss or two, as fitted with his manner of thought, then hopped off, like a heron afore he takes wing, an' just got front gate home behind him when the yellow dog comed against it, like a pillar o' fire all ends up, as if he'd been shot out of a cannon. So he escaped that peril, but Farmer Nymet didn't, 'cause, for all his high-handed way wi' the tale-bearer, the tale hurt un an' worried un a braave deal. He didn't tell his wife, but that night he talked to Sib, an' she awned up, an' her faither gived her a dressin' down wi' his tongue that made her mazed fust, an' then mad. For she was all spirit, an' like a unbroken colt as had never been crossed or felt switch or halter in her life till now. Presently she grawed cooler an' axed quiet, wi' her eyes so bright as flowers in spring, why 'twas as her faither had ordained she wasn't to keep comp'ny wi' the awnly man the world held for her taste.

An' Nymet, he just said, "Wan word's so gude as a thousand in this matter. He'm

a poor man; an' you'm a rich gal—or will be; an' 'tis the wrong order of things, an' contrary to nature for the woman to have riches an' the man nought. An' if you want more reasons, 'tis my will."

"Riches!" she sez wi' a fine contempt. "Why, you ought to know wiser'n that, faither. You didn't school me for nought, anyway; an' so I tell you, dear faither, that the difference is nothing to name at all. 'Tis awnly—what? You've got perhaps five or six thousand pound in the bank, an' he've got thirty years in the Bank o' Time to draw upon 'fore he'm your age. What may a man not do in thirty year? An' specially a man by the name an' nature of a Drake?"

"He'm not the Drake for my duck, however," said Farmer Nymet, "an' if to face your faither wi' sharp speeches be all they larned 'e to school, gormed if I ban't sorry ever I sent 'e."

Then the gal cuddled on his lap an' pulled his beard, for they was all the world to each other, an' though he said hard things here an' theer, she knawed

by the sound of his voice when to b'lieve un an' when not.

"Us caan't all be wonders, like you," she said.

"Wonder or no wonder, let them as have earned five thousand pound be the fust to turn up theer noses at it. Ban't the rich man speaks onkindly of money most times, but them as ain't got none, an' doan't know how to earn it. Anyway, 'tis a more useful stand-by than a forbear as have waited under salt sea for the last Trump this three hunderd year an' more, God rest his great soul. I'm not sayin' as he didn't ought to be proud to his marrow of such a name, for I've read the man's story in my Prince's *Worthies*, an' I glowed to think as Drake was all Devon to his last heart's blood. There's none as takes such spacious, Old Testament views of England's inheritance nowadays as what he done, an' I'm sure I thank God he was born in season, for if he had comed along nowadays, they'd lock him up for sartain—just to please them damn newspapers. But what's all this to the young man? He ban't the richer by a cocoanut for Drake's high doin's.

An' 'tis awnly his foggy fancy, so like as not, that he do come down from Sir Francis. Anyway, it mustn't be, an' I bid you forget the man, so as your awn peace o' mind shall be the surer come bymebye."

"We Nymets always speak our minds, an' know our minds, doan't us?" said the wench, smiling in his faace, an' patting his cheek.

"We've got that reputation, my dear. So be it ; us'll leave it at that."

But 'twasn't gwaine to be left theer, of course. Even farmer knawed better'n that, an' in his slow, well-balanced way he set about lookin' into the matter of young Drake to see what fashion of chap he was, an' how thought upon by those who knawed him well.

But while farmer went about to larn, them young fules put theer silly heads together an' took Providence to task purty roughly ; as the like of 'em have done often afore, an' Providence not wan penny the worse, by all account. Then they plotted an' planned theer far-reaching fulishness ; an' Sibella's was the blame, or praise, for no man would have thought of such a trick. 'Twas like this. Theer comed a Giglet

Market, an' Ted's gran'mother tawld un her was gwaine, an' Sib said as how she had a mind to see the fun tu, an' take business wi' pleasure. "I be gwaine for a servant," she tawld her faither; an' he grumbled an' said theer was enough servants to Nymets a'ready; but she went, an' she went alone, though why she took a box packed wi' her clothes, who could say? An', of course, nobody knawed that she had done so till arter.

Giglet Market, I should tell 'e, was a gert contrivance in them days. 'Tis sinked in these times to nothin', though theer's a pretence of keeping it up. Wance 'twas a reg'lar hiring fair, an' men an' maids—but maidens mostly—went in their numbers, an' them as wanted servants could go an' take theer pick. But theer's little more than merry-making an' sweethearting to a Giglet Market now. Awnly the young folks goes, an' has a bit o' fun, an' wastes a bit o' money as had better far be put by to goody in Savings Bank.

Anyhow, auld Granny Drake was theer, an' her errand weern't no fun nor junketing;

an' Ted stopped at home; an' Sib Nymet went for her awn private ends. Very next day farmer had made up his mind to make a definite offer for her happiness; but next day never comed—leastways, not as her faither reckoned 'twould, so Sib didn't hear how farmer had made inquiries touchin' Ted, an' how he'd larned nothin' but gude of him, an' how he was gwaine to propose a year's probation after he'd had a long talk wi' the man. Sibella—poor li'l' fule—never felt till arter how deep her parent's love was towards her, so she acted on impulse, an', what's more, come very near tellin' a downright lie—a lie in spirit, if not in letter.

Anyway, wance to Ockington, she gived the farm lad who drove her a note to her faither, an' tawld un to go home after he'd looked around the fair. Then putting her box away safe to an inn, she walks in the Giglet Market so meek an' humble as if she was the eldest of a ploughman's family of a dozen, 'stead of darter of Judah Nymet.

A gude few knawed her, of coorse, an' she tawld 'em plain an' downright that the case was altered, an' that her an' her faither

couldn't agree no more, 'cause each knowing theerself to be in the right, wouldn't bend to t'other.

"I'll never rucksy down to him," Sib said, "therefore I be gwaine into the world to do for myself an' keep my peace of mind."

They laughed at her, them as was her equals; but they very soon seed as she meant it, awnly she set such a douce an' all of a price 'pon her services that it 'peared she wasn't for that market nohow. There she stood, quiet an' cool, an' so business-like as you please; but seein' as she'd got no character, 'cause she'd never been to sarvice afore, 'twas vain to ax strangers ten pound a year for her wage. Folks laughed when she said it, an' wanted to know if she thought money grawed 'pon the hedges, an' went on to find other gals wi' a humbler conceit of theerselves. But her'd got a smile an' a ready word for everybody as comed around her; an' that dainty her looked, in plain print an' a pink sun-bonnet, that more'n wan lout, wi' a heart a-beggin', offered her a differ'nt sort o' bargain, an' axed her to keep comp'ny along wi' him from that day forth,

accordin' to the free an' easy way in fair-time fifty year ago.

Then what that clever young woman was waitin' for comed into Giglet Market—an ancient, dumpy woman in a risty black gown an' black bonnet. The auld sawl peeped 'bout 'mongst the maidens, an' Sibella popped awver to her an' said—

“Do 'e want a gude gal, missis? 'Cause if so, I'd be very pleased if you'd give me a chance to sarve 'e.”

But auld woman said—

“You'm like the rest, I reckon; you'd count Honeyweather Farm tu lonely an' wisht. 'Tis out 'pon the heart of the Moor, Li'l' Silver way, an' theer'd be no comp'ny for 'e.”

“That won't stand in the way. If you'd give me wan Sunday a month to see my friends to Little Silver, 'tis all I'd ax 'e. You'm Mrs. Drake, I s'pose?”

“I be; an' my gran'son farms the plaace, as my husband an' my son did afore un. Can 'e milk?”

“Ess fay, an' I've got two prizes for my butter afore to-day.”

"Will 'e come for nought, or must 'e have money?" axes Mrs. Drake, reluctant-like.

Sib thought very wisely, then looked to it as nobody else weern't in earshot, an' said—

"I'll come for two pound a year, ma'am, to be raised to five if us suit each other at end of the fust year."

Auld lady knawed what trouble 'twas to get a young thing to stop at Honeyweather, so she agreed to the terms, an' axed if Sib would drive along back wi' her that very day; an' Sib said she would. So next, granny sez—

"An' what might your name be?"

"Hatherley," answers the gal; an' 'twas true, because her full name was Sibella Hatherley Nymet, so called after her man gossip, a friend of her faither's. Of course, Mother Drake didn't knaw her from Eve, for auld lady was nearly sand blind at best, an' she might have been hiring the Dowl's black self for all she could see; awnly she was a very nice judge of a voice, an' Sib's speech ringed most so musical as harmonium to church.

Come bymebye, they got her box an' drove away home; an' when Ted Drake walked in to supper an' seed Sib, he said to his grandam, wi'out turnin' a hair or winkin' a eyelash—

“Be this the maiden, my auld dear?”

An' Granny Drake said—

“Ess, Teddy; an' I awnly hope her can do all her sez, for her wouldn't come wi'out wages.”

Then Ted, he turned to the joy of his life an' axed—

“An' what be called, young woman?”

An' Sib sez to un—

“Hatherley, please, sir.”

An' when granny turned her back for a moment an' went in the parlour, them two falled a-kissin' an' a-cuddlin', an' the gal sobbed cruel all awver the washin' up, half wi' pride at her awn cleverness, half wi' fear to think what was comin' next, an' how the trick might end.

Yet, 'cause things had just falled out to their silly plannin', them gabies thought as it must be all right. Gal had awnly told her faither in her letter as she was gwaine

out in the world to earn her livin', but she never said wheer, so theer rose a hue an' cry next day. An' luck had it that none knawed ezacally wheer she'd went to, though many had seen her along wi' other gals to Giglet Market. But Ted's thought was to put up the banns next Sunday, an' as his farm laid in a parish belonging t'other side the Moor, he hoped an' reckoned nobody that signified would hear tell 'bout his bowldaciousness till 'twas tu late to stop him.

But two days afore they was to be axed out, if that snake of a Crooked Yole didn't run Sib to airth, like the hound he was! Fortune willed that he was sneakin' round 'pon Sittaford Tor, outside Honeyweather Farm, an' seed the young woman come to the door an' shake out tablecloth arter dinner. So that time he went to Nymet's wi' his head held high, an' when he comed away he was richer by a five-pound note, which was the published reward farmer had gived out for the fust news of his darter. An' the yellow dog nearly broke his neck tryin' to help Yole on his way, but the beast

couldn't get free of his chain, luckily, else Crooked Yole wouldn't have had no more gude of his money than what Judas had, by all accounts.

'Tis a coorious thing, but you'll very seldom find a gal as can make gude butter have got a gude temper; so when Granny Drake found that Sib was both gude-tempered an' 'mazin' clever in the dairy, she knawed as she'd come by a treasure, an' rejoiced accordin'.

Then rode up Judah Nymet on his grey cob to Honeyweather, an' Sib, as was out 'pon the hillside gatherin' raxens, seed un. Ted chanced to be along with her at the time, an' the raxens, or rushes, as you'd call 'em, was for plaiting; which Sib was very coorious at. But down dropped her bundle an' down dropped the corners of the gal's mouth when she seed the figure of her faither three parts of a mile away riding into the farm. Black as night grawed Ted, I warn 'e, for 'twas clear the secret had come out; an' in his passion he said how he'd strangle the tell-tale wi' his awn fingers if ever he catched un.

Meanwhile, auld gran'mother an' Farmer Nymet had a tell. She didn't knaw un, of course; theerfore his talk surprised her a bit.

"I've comed for the gal, so you can bring her out wi' no more words," he said.

But granny weern't gwaine to part wi' her new maid for the axin'. She reckoned the man just wanted to sloke away Hatherley 'cause her was such a valuable sarvant. So she said—

"No, fay, whoever you be. The young woman comed to me of her awn free will, an' covenanted wi' me for money an' a rise in wages presently. An' her'm like to be a treasure, so I'll keep her."

"I've a better right to her than you, however," answered farmer. "Though I'm doubting if she's the treasure you think her."

"Hatherley not a treasure? But I knaw she be."

"Calls herself Hatherley, do she? Cunning twoad!"

"She's honest as a rose, wi' no guile in her nature. Do 'e think I doan't knaw a maid's character, an' me at my time o'

life? A gude, plain-dealin' wench. You should have heard what she said 'bout that bad gal to Little Silver as have runned from her home—Farmer Nymet's darter. She wondered how 'twas such things could be, when my gran'son Ted brought the news."

"Wonnerful gal! Well, I do think she's better wi' you than me, mother, when all's said. But I've brought her a message from her friends to Little Silver. I'll deliver it, and then be off."

"She's out o' doors just this minute—gone for raxens 'pon the Moor, Sittaford way. Her's clever at plaitin' of 'em."

"True, she be," said Nymet, who had a straw hat made by his darter 'pon his head at that moment. "Then I'll find her theer. Gude marnin', ma'am, an' gude fortune to 'e."

Auld woman nodded an' thanked un', then off he went to Sittaford Tor, an' theer, sure enough, was Sib an' her man with her. Theer weern't no runnin' away, so they stood up an' faced farmer wi' the best grace they could, which weern't much.

Nymet wished 'em a very good day, an'

they hoped he was well ; an' he said he was, an' thanked 'em kindly. Then he bid 'em listen to him, an' made longest speech as he was ever credited with.

"If you'd bided another four-an'-twenty hour," said Nymet, "I was gwaine to do what might have pleased the pair of 'e, for I'd heard nought but gude of you, young man—though now, I reckon, 'twas mostly lies they told me. Anyway they said nothin' to make me dream you could have played this paltry trick. An' now the case is altered. This here gal have lawfully covenanted wi' your gran'mother to work for wages ; an' so she shall. I ordain fust as she do bide at Honeyweather for a year from Giglet Market, an' us'll see what sort of character Mrs. Drake gives her at the end of that time. That's what you've got to do, Sibella Hatherley Nymet—'Hatherley,' indeed ! An' I doan't wish to see nor hear nothin' about 'e till the end of that time. But while you'm doin' your duty here, this young shaver must play his part tu. An' away he've got to come—to Nymet's. His awn farm will do very well wi'out him, I lay,

for I knaw his man, Sam Oldreive, an' he'll see after Honeyweather so well as his master could. That's my offer; take it or leave it. You to bide here an' work for your living, an' Drake to put in a year at Nymet's under my awn eyes, so as I can see what fashion o' mud he'm made of. Do that, an' if you'm of a mind a year hence, an' auld lady be pleased wi' Sib, an' I be satisfied wi' this chap, then you shall wed. That's my offer, an' I doan't change it by wan hour. Sit down 'pon that rock, the pair of 'e, an' I'll give 'e ten minutes to take it or leave it. An' if I wasn't a soft-hearted fool I'd disown this here gal 'stead of rewarding her wickedness with such a easy bargain."

Not a syllable more did Judah say; but five minutes was enough for Ted Drake, an' though Sib pulled a long face, it had to be. Ted walked respectful to Farmer Nymet's saddle, an' said—

"Oldreive an' his wife do sleep at Honeyweather, so you've no call to be 'feared for Sib. An' I'll come awver this evenin', sir, an' show 'e how a Drake can work."

"That'll do very nice," said Nymet. "Gude-bye, darter. Mind, the harder you work, quicker time will pass. An' you can be to Nymet's at eight o'clock or so, in time for supper, my son." Theer was some-thin' in them last two words as warmed Ted's heart, an' showed un farmer was the right sort.

An' that's end of the tale, for bwoy an' gal both had got some Devon grit to 'em, an' the more they thought 'pon the matter the more they knowed as they desarved a much harder reward for theer stupid, tom-fool deed than what they had received.

Poor auld Mrs. Drake was flabbergasted when she knawed 'bout it, an', such is the contrariness of even gran'mothers, that she'd have done all Sib's work so well as her awn to get Ted back home again. For 'twas hard on her losin' a year of the lad, seein' as her awn years was gettin' so few to count upon. But Sib comed to be like a darter to her; an' farmer made all parties happy, for upon Christmas Day he let Ted go to Honeyweather to spend the time wi' his gran'mother, an' had Sib home to Nymet's.

Awnly for that one day of everlasting rejoicing 'twas; an' even then he looked to it very sharp as Sib didn't get a wink of Ted, nor him of her.

The toil made a woman of her, an' hardened her muscles, an' strengthened her body an' sawl; while as for Ted, farmer grawed to b'lieve he was so gude as any Drake ever bred in Devon since Sir Francis.

They married in due course, an' lived in the li'l' auld farm 'pon the Moor till their childern comed an' granny passed away. Then Farmer Nymet helped 'em to a better place, an' they do dwell now down Bovey way.

TOLD TO CHAPLAIN

YOU can take it or leave it, as you mind to do; awnly Lard knaws 'tis gospel, an' so long as He's satisfied, I reckon theer's no need for any man to trouble more.

'Twas like this, then; me an' Jacob Chowne did use to labour 'pon auld Veale's farm, by name "Five Sisters"—'cause of they granite boulders sticked up 'pon the Moor in times past by the Phœnicians, I've heard tell. An' theer us worked for Farmer Veale year in year out through four winters. Chowne was a Methody, an' so was auld man; an' I was nought; an' Damaris, auld man's darter, was nought, though she pretended Methody for to please her faither. As to Five Sisters, 'tis a God-forgotten fashion o' plaace, 'pon the eastern slope o' Dartymoor, Chaggyford way. Poor as a

mouse was farmer, yet us sticked to un like burrs—me an' Chowne—for wages, though low enough, was sure, an' us was awnly common men o' the soil, as didn't knaw much, an' couldn't well afford to pick an' choose.

Then, in the matter o' farmer's darter, us falled out, 'cause, though the likes of her was above us every way, yet the pair of us couldn't keep our thoughts off her, nor yet our hearts, for that matter. A wonnerful bowerly maid her was, an' a towser for work, an' 'mazin' even-tempered tu. In fact, Damaris was awnly person as could keep auld man in hand when things went cross-ways with un an' times was more'n common hard. In plain words, us was both deep in love with her, an' she 'peared a bit interested like; an' us, bein' both young softies, didn't see or think as her took count of us for lack of another man 'bout the plaace. 'Twas sheer loneliness turned her to us, an' made her talk wi' such as we, an' let us talk along o' she. But presently, from lack of a better chap, she grawed to love me. God be gude to her, an' send a strong

right arm an' a heart worthy of my Damaris. For, rope or no rope, 'tis the picksher of her red lips an' soft eyes an' butivul plump arms as I'll see to the end o' my short time now. 'She comed to love me so true as ever a maid loved a man, she did; an' that's reward enough for such a chap as me, as doan't deserve to be minded any more arter the airth covers un.

Us loved her worse an' worse; an' theer weern't no jealousy 'bout it fust two year or so, 'cause us would so soon have thought of bein' jealous 'bout the light of the marnin' sun. Her was clean out of reach, an' that was all us could say or feel 'pon the subject. But time passed, an' sudden theer come a mighty gert slice o' gude fortune for me an' for Chowne both. An' the terrible coorious thing was as his luck an' mine falled to us both 'pon the identical day. Me an' Damaris took a walk in the dimpsy same evenin' as a letter had come for Jacob Chowne. Us wandered through wane o' light till the flittermice was wingin' an' the owls hootin' from the woods. A pleasant evenin', an' lonely, an' her eyes star-bright, to my think-

ing. Us didn't say much ; then she axed some vain question, an' I couldn't answer, bein' so much occupied lookin' at her. An' then, what wi' the moon gettin' up like a gert red apple awver the Moor edge, an' the dim shadows, an' silence, an' whisper o' life hidden, an' the sound of her dress 'gainst the wayside grasses, my sawl o' manhood rose in me an' I spake o' love to her, though my awn voice was new to me an' my knees shook. But I was turned into a savage thing for the time, an' put my arms around her, an' tawld her she was my life or death, my dream night an' day, just all, all, all to me. God had scored that hour for my high-water-mark o' happiness, I reckon. The gal didn't scratch my faace, or cry, or send me packing wi' a flea in my ear, as I counted upon, but just shut her butivul eyes, an' sighed, an' put her l'il' hands awver mine, as was around her waist, an' let me cuddle her an' talk love ; which I done to a poor, lop-sided tune, but best ways I could, havin' no gert choice o' words, as you may see. I swore how I loved her true ; how, if her willed, I'd saave money for her, an' sweat

double tides for her, an' some day make a home for her, an' be so gude a husband as my gert sea-deep worship of her could make me. An' she sez—I mind 'zactly what—pleasant words for a man to hear. She sez, "You was a auld, blind bat, I reckon, Benjamin Rowe," she sez, "for I've loved 'e dear, I have, these many days—loved 'e with all my heart, an' nobody else at all."

So I kissed her mouth, an' us sat wi'out a word 'pon a stile in Throwley Wood, an' listened to a baggerin', gert fern-owl a-churnin' an' a-chatterin', till Damaris said as 'twas a wisht noise an' axed me what I was thinkin' 'bout.

"I lay 'tis a castle in the air," sez she, as had wonnerful thoughts an' sayin's got from books. An' I answers—

"No fay—ban't that, but a cottage 'pon the airth, 'pon the gude red airth down Newton Abbot way; for I be most tired o' Dartymoor."

With that her sighed, an' allowed as the Moor was a hard master, but vowed that she'd never leave "Five Sisters" whiles her

faither lived ; an' I said as how I wouldn't neither.

So us sat under the moon, heart to heart, as wan may say. A gert, glorious time for king or tinker when the gal as be loved better'n salvation answers "'Ess!"—'specially if you'm dead sure she's gwaine to say t'other thing. Theer I sat, so dumb as a newt wan minute, babblin' out the huge love as I'd got for her the next, an' then dumb again, whilst the gert beetles boomed by, so solemn as a church organ, an' there comed now an' again a chirrup from the field crickets that cry by night.

Then gwaine home-along us met Jacob Chowne, as knawed wheer we'd gone ; an' I had but time to slip my arm away from round her, when he was upon me. I seen the grey shadow of him an' the red glimmer of his pipe.

"You'm late," he said ; "I comed to look for 'e."

"A braave night for a walk under the woods," said Damaris, so cool as cool.

"So 'tis," he answered her, "an' I hopes as you've enjoyed it ; an' if you can bide out

so long wi' Ben Rowe to-night, I'll make bold to hope as you'll go walkin' wi' me to-morrow."

Then us all grawed quiet, an' I was glumpy in my mind wi' a sense o' comin' trouble, an' a grawin' feelin' as I couldn't trust Chowne wi' my gal. I was for tellin' him the gert thing as had happened, so as he shouldn't live in doubt. 'Twas 'pon the point of my tongue so to do when Damaris spoke. For something to say, I reckon, but not out of cooriousness, her bein' the least inquisitive maid ever I met, she axed him wheer his letter comed from that marnin', for 'twas a strange, fantastic thing for post-man to visit "Five Sisters," an' Jacob, as had been waitin' to be axed that question I judge, sez—

"Oh, 'tis a lawyer's writin'—just a come-by-chance o' money left me by my Uncle Chowne, the butcher to Exeter, as died Christmas time. He falled out cruel wi' my faither 'fore faither died, an' I never counted to be a penny the better when he went out of it hisself; but here 'tis—a fact seemin'ly—as he've left me five hunderd

pound o' money. It bides for me up to Exeter—a tidy sum for the likes o' me, certainly."

So he spoke, an' Damaris wished him joy of it, an' I thanked my stars as I'd plucked courage to speak 'fore he had. For now, wi' the Bank o' England behind un, so to say, I knawed he'd ax her same question as what I done. Not as I feared the answer, wi' her voice still in my ears an' the taste of her red lips in my memory. Yet a wide difference theer was betwixt us two—me an' Chowne—an' all in favour of him. Better lookin', better dressed Sundays, better words to his tongue, an' five hunderd pound to goody 'gainst a rainy day; an' me awnly a bit bigger in the bone than him, an' harder to stand to work, yet no more than a huge-built, hairy man, wi' a yellow beard on me, an' gert strength o' thew an' sinew; but few more clothes than what I stood up in, an' a auld mother to keep at Little Silver, as took half my wages—an' a damned gude use for 'em tu.

So it stood, that wonnerful moony night; an' I just gived the man joy of his luck same

as Damaris ; an' somehow I couldn't mention my awn gude fortune to him at the minute, for something tawld me that if he knawed the gal was out o' reach an' wouldn't never share all his mort o' money with him, thicky five hunderd pound would just turn to dust an' ashes in his thought. So I ordained to shut my mouth for wan night anyway, an' let un dream his dreams in peace—a kinder thought for him than ever he shawed for me arter. So us went to the house, me an' him an' the gal ; an' I lay 'twould puzzle a judge o' the court to say which was the happiest an' proudest an' contentedest of us three then.

Jacob didn't wait long 'fore he axed my maid to marry un ; but I'd won the prize, an' 'twould have made no matter if his five hunderd had been five thousand ; she couldn't have took him of free will for a husband. How he put it to her I never axed, bein' no affair of mine ; but it seemed as he didn't take her "No" easy by any means—in fact, he wouldn't take it at all ; an' when he heard as how I was the chap, hé just laughed an' said he wasn't gwaine to

let that content him, as theer couldn't be no doubt between a man wi' money an' me, as was awnly just strong enough to keep my mother out the union workhouse.

Then Damaris flared up an' tawld un as theer weern't no doubt at all, an' that I was worth twenty of un, an' that the sooner he packed his bundle an' left "Five Sisters" the better she'd be pleased.

But he didn't go for her axin'. He comed to me an' had a tell all wan Sunday arternoon, an' he offered me money to be off wi' the gal. A hunderd pound he bid for her, then two hunderd; then he grawed in a white heat an' offered me the blazin' lot if I'd give her up to him. So I axed un what the dowl he thought I was made of; an' he said 'twas that he wanted to knaw, an' meant finding out. So we comed to high words, an' same night he had speech wi' farmer, while I tawld Damaris the manner o' man as Chowne really was. She 'peared 'mazed, as he could honestly put her afore his money, an' I reckon it softened her heart towards un a little; but it soon grawed hard again when she found what the man

had been up to along wi' her faither. An' then the house was divided against itself, in Bible phrase, 'cause auld Veale favoured Jacob against me, an' bid his darter to take Chowne wi'out more words, seein' as he knawed—none better—the solid value an' blessed uses o' five hunderd pound. But she stood to me an' said her mind was made up against un ; so there was me an' Damaris 'pon wan side, an' auld Veale an' Jacob Chowne on t'other.

'Coorse I reckoned to be sent packing arter the row, but though farmer said us must part, he didn't bid me go, an' I judged as he was waitin' to look round for a new hand arter harvest. But still when autumn comed he made no sign, an' me an' Damaris thought, poor fules, as the wind was changin' an' all gwaine to be right. Then theer fell out the burnin' of the hayrick, as you've heard about. 'Twas awnly a rubbishy auld, ancient stack, useless for all purposes, rotten atop an' full of varmints below ; but wan night it caught afire, an' nobody was sorry but the rats to see the end of it. Then, when us was all tired o' talkin' 'bout it, an'

'twas in a fair way to be forgot, who should come in "Five Sisters" Farm gate wan midday but Bill Karslake, the head p'lice-man to Chaggyford, an' two constables along wi' un!

I gave Karslake "gude day," an axed un if he'd heard anythin' 'bout the auld stack, an' he sez, lookin' at me queer—

"Ess, Ben Rowe, I'm afeard I have. An' you should knaw all about it, if any wan."

An' I sez—

"Be blessed if I do! Why, if you ax me——"

An' then he cuts me short, an' sez—

"Anything you tells us now will be used against 'e, Ben, so best to keep your mouth shut. An' if you'm wise you'll come quiet, 'cause come you've got to."

An' bein' innocent as babe unborn, I gasps at that, I do assure 'e. But I had sense to ax who 'twas as testified against me, and Karslake takes the warrant from his pocket, an' tells me how farmer was against me, an' how Jacob Chowne had taken his lawful an' Bible oath that he seed me fire the rick by night.

Awnly Damaris was to home just then, an' she gave Karslake the edge of her tongue braavely; but the men, knawin' what was gwaine to fall, had gone each his way, an' Chowne was out 'pon the land, an' farmer down to Okehampton. So I went in the trap they'd brought, an' the gal was left all alone to "Five Sisters"—all alone to break her heart 'bout the wickedness of her faither against me.

They took me to Okehampton clink, as we calls "lock-up," an' next day the pair of 'em stood up afore the magistrates wi' a hookem-snivey lie they'd hatched, an' I was 'mazed as a sheep wi' it, an' then blazed out an' swore at 'em; but weern't no use, 'cause the Justices sent me for trial to next 'Sizes at Exeter.

"You'm lucky," a chap said as they took me back to lock-up; "for the 'Sizes be no more'n a week off, an' you'll have but a short time to wait."

Yet, so it chanced, I didn't bide even so long as that, 'cause I done the mad thing you knaws of, an' findin', two days afore my time for gwaine to Exeter, that the

prison was rotten, an' that by twistin' my neck-cloth round the window-bars I could bend 'em together easier'n talkin', I done it wan night, an' found no more'n a twelve-foot drop between me an' freedom. 'Twas a trick a fireman had taught me to bend the bars, a dodge housebreakers use tu, as they said in court arter. An' I done it for no better reason than 'cause I felt somethin' cryin', cryin' in me to escape an' get level wi' Chowne an' auld Veale, no matter what might fall out arter.

Very marnin' I was due in Exeter for trial I got away—wi' the dowl to steady my hand an' foot, I reckon; slipped down by them dark woods alongside Okehampton Castle, crossed the river, climbed the hill awver the railway, passed the soldiers' quarters, an' got to the Moor 'fore marnin' light. An' then I held on awver Belstones to Cosdon Beacon, an' so worked out 'pon the road to Little Silver an' Throwley, an' Five Sisters Farm on the Moor edge. Theer I laid by the highway, in wan of them roundy-poundies built by the auld men, an' thought as how I'd burst in 'pon

the farm presently an' have it out wi' them as had done evil against me, an' get forty shillin' or a month against Jacob Chowne.

The rest be a dream-picksher now, an' I can scarce mind the fallin' out of the time. Awnly I knaws that suddenly comed the sound o' wheels an' the sight of a market cart bowling along to Okehampton. Then I minded that 'twas the day I should be gwaine to Exeter for trial, an' that auld Veale an' Jacob theer, so smug an' sleek an' Sundayfied, was ridin' to catch the train that they might travel to Exeter to lie against me, same as they done afore the Justices of the Peace.

Then hell brawk loose in me, an' I weern't my awn man no more. I'd got nought but a stake from the hedge to help my feet, but that was enough, an' afore the rogues had passed I was out 'pon the road at the pony's head.

There was the fear o' man caught in crooked ways 'pon 'em then!

"'Struth! He's brawked prison!" stutters out farmer; but t'other couldn't speak. He 'peared to knaw, in the dirty heart of him,

what was comin', an' glazed 'pon me, mute an' starin' as a dead fish.

I spawk my mind to 'em, an' used words theer ban't no call to tell again at a time like this. I said as how theer wickedness was clear afore me, an' how I was gwaine to take payment out o' hand for the black thing they'd done to me. But auld man I couldn't touch, an' the grey, bent, ancient piece knawed he was safe, an' got out o' the cart, an' footed off so fast as he was able Throwley way to bid all men help take me in the name o' the law. But t'other I meant bein' upsides with, by hook or crook, an' I haled the man out of the cart by the scruff of his neck, an' tawld un to stand to his job an' fight. He had no choice, an' 'twas a ugly go for un, but fair fist work all the same, 'cause I never struck the chap wi' anything but my clenched hand. Men boilin' under a gert wrong don't choose very nice wheer they hit, an' I got un down against a stone wall by the wayside, an' lathered un to the truth of music till his eyes rolled round an' he went fainty. Then I flinged un away from me, but I thought

'twas airth behind un, not granite, an' it weern't my wish or intent to crack the head of un an' let the brains out. The man dropped in a heap, an' theer I left un, wi' li'l' more than a sore body an' a spoiled faace, as I thought, an' so took my tracks again. Then, knawin' as 'twas awnly a bigger dose o' law as I'd got by my deed, I thought sudden of Damaris, an' longed awful for just wan hug of her an' wan word from her lips afore I gived myself up an' took what was waitin' to Exeter.

To "Five Sisters" I went, an' a ugly picksher for a young gal I was, no doubt, for 'pon sight of me her turned so white as curds. An' I tawld her what had falled out, an' how her faither an' Chowne had hatched devilries against me to poison her mind, an' what Chowne had got for his payment. Then her went wild, as women will at such high, searchin' moments; an' her screeched a bit, but soon grawed quiet, an' comed round, an' tawld me how they'd 'most made her promise to wed wi' Jacob Chowne by threats an' words. An' she fell 'pon the ground an' raved, for I was

just flingin' off, not carin' what become of me after hearin' them words; but she prayed me to take her with me, 'cause life was gone sour wi'out me; an', bein' awful leary for somethin' to eat an' drink, I forgived her, an' washed to the horse-trough in the yard, an' comed in an' fed my full, which made the future look a different colour.

But, God's my witness, I'd no dream of what I had worked 'pon Chowne, an' when theer comed men an' a hurdle between 'em, an' farmer, an' a whole township of people followin' arter, an' Damaris seed 'em tu, an' grawed pale as death, I felt my skin break out in a sweat o' fear, for I knawed then what I'd done, wi'out words.

"You've killed un, by the looks of it," she sez. "Best to run for it, Ben, while theer's time, an' afore they find you here. They'll pinch no word out o' me," she sez; "not if they had hell fire to torture me with."

So fear comed awver me—such a mad fear as awnly killing of a man breeds, I reckon; an' I runned for it—runned to hide

myself—not from men, but the thing on the hurdle. An' her never said a word—Damaris didn't—not till arter they catched me a week later, stealin' bread out of a baker's cart down Horrabridge way.

An' as for hangin', I judge it a light matter, maister, arter that week in the mists on the high tors. An' theer ban't no more to say, for 'twas fair, plain murder, though not intended as such, an' theer isn't no call for you to tell me not to hope awver-much, 'cause my heart's noways set 'pon the petition folks signed for me. So, if I'm stringed up to-morrow, I'll go thankin' you for all you've taught me of late days; an' I'll go in the sure knowledge you'll seek the gal when you can an' bid her know as I loved her to the end; an' that when she was cryin' out her purty eyes at day-spring on the marnin' they put me away, I was thinkin' of her tu, an' hopin' wi' my last heart-beat as the right chap would come along to her in fulness o' time.

AN OLD TESTAMENT MAN

JUDAH NYMET, o' Nymets, was his name; an' in late life he got hisself disliked by those in authority, all owing to the coorious, old-fashioned ways he looked at things. Not as I could ever see he stood out o' bias, for everything what he done was founded 'pon the Law an' the Prophets; an' surely the patriarchs of Holy Writ be tidy models for a everyday, homespun man o' the soil? Still, new times, new manners, an' I be the last to deny as the world's moved on a bit since Abraham. But Nymet wouldn't allow it, an' his doctrine, that a plain dealer couldn't do no better than follow the auld road, worked out in a way to hurt people's feelin's here and theer; though certainly for his awn part he never fretted, bein' steadfast sure that he was 'pon the right side o' the

hedge, along wi' them Auld Testament heroes of the Five Books.

Judah Nymet, he lived to Little Silver, an' when his faither died, took awver Nymets Farm, as you may see spread like a school map 'pon the green hills under Dartymoor, Okehampton way. No newtake neither, but a plaace o' butivul rich tilth an' lovely grass. Cattle was his stronghold, an' he made gude money an' a plenty of it, for he lived in fear o' the Lard, by all accounts, an' was a right-handed sort o' man, wi' a Bible word for most every affair of life. He married so gude a maid as ever you see, an' had a brace o' gals an' wan bwoy by her. Both sisters married very gude-fashioned men, though the business of Sibella an' young Drake made talk at the time. But they was both happily settled 'fore they was twenty year auld; an' the lad he bided wi' his faither an' comed to man's age by slow degrees.

Never was such a chap as auld Nymet for the manners and customs of his ancestors. He'd keep up all the ancient uses, an' he grawed amazin' impatient wi' the farmers an' folk round about when they gived awver

christening their apple trees 'pon auld Christmas night, an' set their faaces 'gainst May revels an' Lent crocking, an' all the virtue hid in aulden charms, an' the magic words o' mouth handed down from wise man to wise man through generation 'pon generation. Certainly Judah hisself followed the ancient uses wheer he could, each in its season; an' he got gert store of gude from em', seemin'ly, for ban't awften as I've heard of a chap travelling so easy through the world as him. In the sunshine most times, wi' a gude wife an' fair childern, gude health, gude friends, an' a gude conceit of hisself. Come to think of it, 'tis most more than any wan man's a right to hope for in this vale, 'specially to a rheumatic district same as Little Silver be.

Nymet, he built his life, letter for letter, 'pon the patriarch Abraham; an' for that matter he 'pears to have been just such another. A upstandin' blue-eyed auld blid, wi' a beard like a river, apple-red cheeks, a voice so deep as tenor bell to church, an' a smell o' the fresh tilled airth about un. He paid tithes an' followed the ways o' Genesis

wi' his flocks an' herds so close as he knawed how. Jacob might have done better wi' his ewes, but I doubt it. Yet tó church the man didn't go, being a psalm-smiter hisself, an' very fond of illuminatin' the Word of God to his awn folk in his awn fashion. He'd got a theorem as the two Testaments didn't 'zactly go 'pon all fours each with t'other; an' while he blamed no man of sober sense who followed the New Testament, for his awn part he thraved in his lot wi' the Auld an' found it suit a workin' farmer better. Yet, mind you, 'twas never heard as anybody denied him the Christian virtues, 'cept Parson Smedley; an', whether or no, Nymet was always ready to help folks in trouble, an' always had a bit of sense to spare for any fule.

Then comed that 'mazin' outcrop o' Auld Testament principles in his middle age as set all Little Silver a chatterin' wi' wonder; an' the tale I be tellin' of was the last straw, so to say it.

But fust you must knaw as Nymet's household was like this. Farmer an' Mrs. Nymet, theer son, Hercules Nymet, an' Margery

Bassett, a poor young niece of Mrs. Nymet's, as was orphaned an' alone in the world an' had come to her aunt 'pon a visit when her mother died, an' never gone again, having nowheers to go to. Now she was part of the life of the place, an' her aunt's right hand indoors, an' a tower of strength in small concerns as axed for common 'sense. A quiet, useful gal an' a fine woman tu, but not a purty wan, 'cept in certain eyes. Hercules thought her well-favoured enough, but he grawed to like her gradual, bein' a cold-blooded build of man hisself, an' takin' arter his mother's family in such matters.

When auld lady was turned fifty-eight an' Judah sixty, theer comed the fortieth return of theer weddin' day, an' rejoicings was kept to Nymets, an' the eldest darter, Sibella Drake, comed, wi' her husband, Ted, an' four childern; an' t'other, Jane Susan Thornbury, as mated wi' an attorney to Plymouth, comed wi' her husband, William, an' three childern. An' theer was gay fun an' braave doin's 'pon Auld Testament models. Anyhow, the sight of his grandchildern, bwoys

an' gals, 'peared to have a terrible coorious influence 'pon Farmer Nymet, for that night he said a thing or two to his lady as kept her awake till marnin' an' helped turn her grey hair to white, no doubt.

'Tis vouchsafed for by my faither, as knawed Lawyer Thornbury' very well, an' heard his wife, Jane Susan, tell how her auld mother gave chapter an' verse for the conversation she'd held overnight, seasoning the tale wi' salt tears, poor gammer, as what auld woman in the same fix wouldn't?

Nymet, he sez, as he puts off his gold watch an' chain an' seeks for the key on his bunch o' seals, "Mother," he sez, "us have been married forty year, an' 'cordin' to the ways o' Providence an' Nature, us can't hope for no more childern of our awn."

Seein' as his youngest, Hercules, was thirty-five year auld, this speech seemed a bit strange to Mrs. Nymet, an' her laughed, little knawin' what was to come.

"Well," he goes on, "I haven't built my house 'pon the Books o' Moses for nought, an' I be gwaine to copy Abraham in a thing or two further yet. I doan't want no talk about

it, an' I wishes you to know that never husband had a better wife than what you've been to me, or felt more thankful to the God o' Israel than I have. But what wan man can do, another can; an' what was well thought 'pon by the Lard in Bible times would be equally well thought 'pon by Him now, for He knaws no shadow of changing. Never a man stood nearer His heart than Abraham, an' to do the same as the patriarch be ever my joy an' pride."

"Sure, you'm just such another, if it ban't irreligious so to say," yawns Mrs. Nymet; for now the cannel was blawed out an' her felt oncommon sleepy arter a busy day.

"Ess, I be—or I try to be," answers back farmer; "an' I'd have slayed my awnly son 'fore the Lard so soon as a sheep if He'd but commanded. But as Abraham done, afore Sarah bore him the bwoy by a miracle of Nature in her dotage, so be I gwaine to do; an' I much hopes as you'll fall in wi' my lofty purpose an' onderstand an' judge accordin'."

"I've never crossed 'e, man," sez his missis, "an' ban't like to begin now."

"Never," he allows. "An', as I doan't want to put no sudden surprise upon you, I'll coil round the point an' come to it gradual like. Doan't go to sleep. D'you mind what Abraham done in Genesis sixteen? 'Twas just arter the horror of gert darkness falled an' the covenant was made 'twixt God an' the auld man touchin' the land of Israel."

"That matter of Hagar," said Mrs. Nymet, who knawed her Genesis so well her husband's self, but was awverpowered wi' sleep.

"Ess—her," he said; an' the next word of un waked up poor auld woman quicker'n cockcrow, I assure 'e.

"Hagar, sure enough," he said; "the Lard o' Hosts willed Abraham to have his wife's maid; an' I'm in the same mind. 'Tis a seemly, patriarchal thing, an' who be gwaine to say me nay?"

Mrs. Nymet thought as Judah had been drinkin', an' thanked Heaven as he'd kep' his bowldacious ideas for her ear an' the darkness o' night; but 'tweern't so by no means. He'd calculated out the pros an'

cons an' the difficulties of Auld Testament ways in nineteenth cent'ry times ; an', what's more to the point by a lot, he'd had speech wi' Margery Bassett herself. She'd got purty spacious ideas 'pon such things herself, seemin'ly, an' didn't 'pear to offer no violent objection, so long as there was a bit o' lawyer's writin' to it. 'Twas a 'mazin' spread of Auld Testament principles, no doubt.

Mrs. Nymet her cried all night, an' next mornin' the fat was in the fire, as they say. Margery was bid go, an' commanded to stay, an' his darters stormed at Judah, an' his sons-in-law talked New Testament to un, an' Hercules stood about in the farmyard starin' at nothin', an' Mrs. Nymet packed her boxes an' unpacked 'em again, an' was found cryin' about in corners. Such a up-store as no man never seed or dreamed outside Barnstaple Fair, I reckon.

But Margery kept cool as a dairy, an' stuck by the auld man. He'd told her there was no shadow of changing wi' the Lard, an' it suited her book, no doubt, to believe it. An' 'tween't May an' December, you

see, 'cordin' to the auld saw, but July an' October more like, him being young for his years an' her a thoughtful woman, aged an' mellowed by sorrow though little more'n thirty.

Cruel for the auld lady, of course, as couldn't for the life of her take the Auld Testament view ; an' a gert flyin' in the face of Little Silver an' Parson Smedley. As for him—parson, I mean—he comed to Nymets in a white-heat wi' all the majesty of his callin' a-shooting from his eyes, despite his slack-twisted ways in most things. A long an' a fiery talk they had of it, by all accounts—a gert battle between the Auld Testament an' the New, so 'tis said. Anyhow Nymet stuck to Genesis an' denied an' defied t'other. As for his missis, nothing was gude enough for her, an' while he planned this wicked antic, he was so gracious an' civil to her as ever. He worshipped her an' the airth she walked awver ; an' his awnly sorrow was that she would take such a narrow latter-day view of the thing he purposed. He 'peared surprised that, seein' the trainin' she'd had for

forty year, her courage should break down afore a simple Auld Testament process.

With his childern an' theer husbands they say he made short work, an' slipped 'em home again wi' scorching chapter an' verse from Isaiah humming 'bout theer ears like hornets; but Hercules, his son, withstood him to his face, an' theer was no lack of hard words between them. Not as any could change him; an' as for the woman, Margery Bassett, she just went her way—a damn difficult way tu, I should reckon—an' bided her time. A calm-faced, awn-self party her was, wi' a heart so deep as a well, an' so cold. Leastways so 'twas supposed by them as judged from what they heard.

Hercules seed her wan day an' had speech wi' her.

“You'm a evil thing,” he sez; “though God knaws I was the last human man ever likely to say so. You'm gwaine to blacken your awn name, an' that of a well-thought-on fam'ly.”

“Not so at all, Hercules,” she tells him. “My life 'fore I came to Nymets was cruel hard—tu steep an' stony to leave any fulish-

ness 'bout the right an' wrong of things in me. I be wan as have suffered hunger an' hard knocks, Hercules ; an' I doan't want to no more. Your faither cares for me, an' I'd give the auld man more'n my body for peace an' plenty an' a home. If I said 'No,' he'd drive me out ; an' if I bide wi' him, he'll marry me in fulness o' time. As for me I've no wish nor yet will to hurt anybody, least of all my aunt, who've been a gude, kind sawl to me ; but 'tis awnly the idea hurts her, not the fact. He'm to her, an' allus will be, what Abraham was to Sarah—a pattern husband. An' who'll be hurt ? You'll be master come bimebye, an' then——”

“Ess, then ? Call home Hagar,” sez the man to her.

“Weern't no lawyers in Hagar's days,” she answers. “Your faither's a kind-hearted, sensible man. But what I gain by him you won't miss, come you follow him, for he'm passing well-to-do, an' all that he has will be yours 'cept a little for me.”

“I must be plain, Margaret Bassett,” sez Hercules. “I wish to God the law would give me power to lock auld man up in the

'sylum—or else you. Now s'pose—but theer, I caan't look ahead—'tis tu dreadful. Just think like a wise gal afore 'tis tu late. I've allus liked 'e that well an' thought that highly of 'e that I m sure a many others must have done the same, for money ban't everything, an' you'll bring what money can't buy—that's sense. How auld be you?"

"Thirty-three."

"An' nobody have ever axed 'e to marry?"

"Why should they? Yet I'd have been a gude wife—a gude wife for wan man. An' I'll be a gude woman to your faither. Hard words doan't break no bones."

Hercules was thinkin' cruel. Thinkin' weern't his stand-by most times, an' it hurt his napper-case a bit, so he said arter. But he kept his brain on the rack for a full five minutes, then axed a question.

"Did you ever love a man?" he said.

"Ess," she answered un, "wan I did."

"Didn't care for 'e?"

"No."

"Married somewan else p'raps?"

"No; he'm bachelor man yet."

"Not a marryin' sort of chap?"

"A gude husband for some maid."

"A Little Silver chap, or wheer you come from, to Chagford?"

"No, a Little Silver chap."

"I could hardly ax 'e to tell me his name?"

"No, fay, ban't reason."

"Do I know un?"

"No."

"Why, surely theer ban't no chap to Little Silver as I doan't know?"

"Wan, theer be."

He scratched his head an' forgot the main question afore this puzzle she'd set him. An' then she took up the talk an' put the matter clear afore Hercules.

"I'll tell you the name if you'm so set 'pon larning it. It's no odds now, for shame be awnly a word to fright silly maidens an' childern. I did love *you*, lad; an' a gude wife I'd have made for 'e—such a wife as ban't awften seen. But let that be. Awnly hark to this: have no fear, you or your sisters, that I'll ever change your faither's heart against you. He do think the world

of my sense, an' when your mother dies, I'll be your stepmother accordin' to lawyer's English. But never no cause to say a hard word against me shall you have."

Well, Hercules needed to chew 'pon this, an' he went away full of the sound of her voice an' the brightness of her eyes, as had been in his mind for many a day. An' time passed; an' Gammer Nymet continued to pack an' unpack, an' arranged to go an' live wi' her darters in turn; an' farmer kep' as serene as a summer day, an' promised as how auld lady should have the best from his awn table an' the fat of his land an' purse, being his dear, cherished wife. He took it unkind in her to go, but hoped when the novelty wore out of the thing, as she'd come home again to her place at the head of his house. But she turned bitter to him an' to Margery Bassett—bitter as a marmalade orange—which was in keeping wi' Bible story, in a sort of way, an' didn't trouble Judah more'n a flea-bite.

Yet the final crash fall'd out in a manner different to what you might have thought.

Auld man, being reasonable in his on-

reason, waited his wife's gude pleasure an' hoped as, after all, she wouldn't leave un; but theer comed a time when he despaired of getting his folks to his views, an' said 'twas a stiff-necked generation, an' carried on after Abraham so ferocious that Mrs. Nymet packed her boxes for gude an' all an' tawld the carrier to call for 'em, an' cried all alone through wan long summer night in the parlour, while Judah fumed upstairs.

Next marnin' husband an' wife met to eat theer breakfast alone, for the young man, Hercules, he'd been to Plymouth for a fortnight, an' the marnin' afore the final flare-up Margery Bassett had left Nymets tu. Her said her was gwaine to spend the day along wi' a friend to Okehampton. Anyhow, while the auld people was at theer silent meal, in come Hercules an' the gal. Of coorse his mother wouldn't stop in same house with her no more, nor yet same room, for that matter; an' so up she gets, blushing rose-red, for all her years.

But Hercules, he sez, "Bide still, mother," he sez, "an' doan't holler afore you'm hurt. Things ban't as they was, an' can't never be

no more, 'cause—'cause—shaw your weddin' finger, Margery," he sez ; an' she done so ; an' theer 'twas out : he'd married her day before down to 'Plymouth all right an' regular ; but whether 'twas church or office I never heard tell. An' a wonnerful, true, high-sawled wife she made un, though some said the whole thing was a plot to get un. But anyway theer was plenty o' history made by 'em arterwards, an' they had their ups an' downs like the rest of us. In fact, come to think of it, she haven't been dead more'n a matter of ten years.

An' as for auld man, 'tis said as he grawed so purple as a plum when he heard the news, an' opened his mouth to ill-wish the wench ; but he changed his mind, an' 'stead o' bustin' a vein or some such accident, let it off wi' a gert laugh—a better way than any Auld Testament blood-lettin' an' language.

Not but what he was zealous for the Book arter, an' died wi' the plagues of Egypt in his ears. But so long as she lived, Mrs. Nymet looked close to it as never no more maids worked to the farm. Awnly two

married women did the household service arter, an' them so cursed thin an' vinegary, that the sole thought as any male got in his mind when they filled his eye was honest sorrow for their gude men.

THE DEVIL'S TIGHT-ROPE

I

NOT far distant from the West Country fishing village of Daleham, and the fame and glory of that hamlet, stands the Head, a limestone crag of dizzy altitude and fantastic shape. The point, as often happens here, juts abruptly forth from amid other precipices of sandstone, and its marble face presents a surface more diversified than the circumjacent cliffs of red Devonian. For the Head is alive with wonderful lemon lights and blue shadows, with the rusty stain of iron and pearly percolations of stalactite on dripping ledges. It harbours sea-fowl and jackdaws unnumbered ; its outlines dwindle in sharp planes towards the summit, and spring harmoniously from the deep sea ; while the whole gigantic mass, ascending above a silver ring of foam, where

summer waters fret its eternal base and a seaweed belt indicates high-water mark along its ramparts, would seem to float upon the sea rather than oppose steadfast barriers to each wave's advance.

Upon a day far past, the wide spaces of the Head gleamed with direct sunlight, its clefts and crannies were embroidered with blossoming thrift and samphire, its golden reflections and wide purple shadows spread peacefully like a dream-island upon the water.

Shoreward the crag was connected with the wild world of the cliffs by a narrow razor-edge of stone, and on either side precipitous and tortuous tracks descended along the edges of tremendous declivities, while below the Devil's Tight-Rope, as this frail path was called, white beaches glimmered and arose the sigh of the sea, no greater in this hour of calm than the breathing of a child asleep.

About the Tight-Rope crossed two tracks at right angles. One passed over the razor-edge to the dizzy summit of the Head, where a small plateau of grass hemmed

with stunted thorn trees extended to the edge of the cliff; and the second, ascending from the white beach by a treacherous sheep path, crossed the other at right angles, then dipped again on the further side, and, forking, wound by one arm along furze-clad cliffs to where the trout-haunted Dale tumbled into the Lovers' Combe, and fell with its second branch to Ore Rocks, beneath the Head. Of these perilous pathways, that extending from one beach to the other was rarely trodden save by sure-footed sheep and goats, or an occasional sea-otter changing his hunting ground; but the Head enjoyed no little patronage, for various reasons. Those who enforced the law, and those who broke it, both found the spot useful, while, beside smugglers and excisemen, the fishers employed this place of vantage to sight the shoals or "schools"—now herrings, now mackerel, now pilchards—each in his right season. For this purpose, indeed, the Head is still employed; but on the summer day we deal with—three parts of a century ago—it was serving another end. In the short grass at the

edge of the cliff a brown, sun-tanned man lay extended with his chin on his folded arms, his eyes fixed upon the sea spread beneath him. He swept the horizon with keen glance, delayed here and there to focus a distant sail more particularly, then resumed his wide survey, yet without seeing what he sought. Beneath, like an enormous jewel of aquamarine, fretted with the sapphire of cloud shadows and lost under opaline and turquoise haze of remote blue towards a misty skyline, the channel rolled; and Jonathan Godbear, reclining comfortably on the very brow of the cliff, chewed blades of grass and pursued his scrutiny with pleasant eyes and a face unmarred by any anxiety, despite the significance of his search.

Not twenty yards distant, at the other extremity of the Devil's Tight-Rope, appeared a second man, in sailor-like costume and with a telescope under his arm. The Excise officer, unaware of any presence on the Head, now proceeded across the narrow road, passed beyond the blackthorn barrier, and started as he discovered the recumbent

watcher. Indeed, he did more than start; passion flamed into his eye and face, and the natural grimness of his great blue jowl and clean-shaven upper lip became much intensified. Robert Bluett, chief of the coast-guardsmen at Daleham, stood before his dearest enemy; while "Merry" Jonathan, as he was called, by a side flash noted the new-comer, then continued to gaze upon the sea.

There was a moment's silence, after which the watcher spoke—

"Give 'e gude-day, gauger."

Bluett growled an inarticulate reply.

"Lookin' for mackerel I be," vouchsafed the first speaker, and the other snorted.

"'Ess, a mackerel wi' French brandy in its belly; an' this here off-shore wind's a gert trouble to her, no doubt."

"You'm quick to think evil of me—always was—an' awnly a poor fisherman as never wronged 'e."

"Curse your grinnin' faace! Never wronged me? You've bested me twice, an' you know it—you an' that hookem-snivey auld grey poll, Cramphorn."

"Ah, now, *he* be a bad un, shockin' bad, I grant that; but me, whoever caught me helpin' to run a cargo?"

"Nobody—that's the pity; but I will. God's my judge, I'll take you yet, an' red-handed, tu!"

"Vain talk, gauger. A innocent man, like what I be, doan't feel no fear o' threats."

"You innocent, you bowldacious smuggler! You innocent! Wheer did Margery Bland get them French fal-lals she weared to prayers last Sunday fortnight?"

Merry Jonathan's expression changed, but he still smiled and still chewed his grass blade.

"Lard! To wear such heathen things to church! Well, 'tis her business, I reckon, not yourn. Ax no questions, an' you won't hear no lies. Still, I'm 'shamed of her."

"I reckon 'tis my business, an' you'll live to know it to your cost some day. I'll lay you in clink yet, Jonathan Godbear."

"Well, I should, Bob; for 'twould be all plain sailin' for 'e then wi' mistress up-long, an' a gert comfort to your mind." He nodded

towards Daleham. "You clap me under hatches, then sail in an' win her—that's my advice to you."

The men were strangely dissimilar, save in the accident of age. Both numbered five-and-thirty years, but other resemblance there was none; and while the strict Puritan probity of the exciseman only combined with his business to harden his stern features, line his forehead, and impart a forbidding and suspicious cast to his weathered countenance, the adventurous and reckless life of the other man had left no sign upon his genial face. He stood taller than Bluett, and was longer in the arm. He looked the world in the eyes, ostensibly followed the business of a fisherman, and, under pretended pursuit of that trade, enjoyed the triumphs, excitements, and dangers of a smuggler's occupation. He was brave, plucky, and thus far fortunate in his nefarious enterprises; for two years he had been a sharp thorn in Bluett's side. Yet, to look at the twain, a chance-beholder had certainly pronounced Jonathan the honest man, and made secret determination to steer

clear of the other. Certain it is that the smuggler would have proved the pleasanter companion.

Mr. Godbear continued to survey the sea, and suddenly his face, concealed from the officer, seemed to waken, and a look of interest flash into his eye. But it vanished again instantly; he rose, yawned, and prepared to depart.

"Mackerel all down Teignmouth way, I reckon," he remarked, grinning into the dark face and frowning eyes fixed upon him. "Well, 'tis dinner-time by the sun, seemin'ly." Then he put up his nose, scanned the sky, and sniffed the air. "Wind's gwaine to change, by the look of it; them copper clouds means foul weather come bimebye. Gude mornin' to 'e, gauger."

The other did not answer, and Godbear took a few paces towards the Tight-Rope, but turned suddenly before reaching it.

"Wheer's my samphire to?" he said; then, stooping down, picked up a big bunch of sea-samphire, whose fleshy, ternate foliage had been growing far below a short hour before. From cleft and cranny and giddy

shelf, within reach of salt foam on stormy days, Jonathan had gathered the aromatic herb.

"Kicklish places it do choose to grow in, gauger."

"Them as is born to be hung won't break theer necks no other way," growled the other.

Jonathan roared with laughter.

"Why, an easy death, Bluett. Now I lay a dollar if Margery Bland had axed you to gather samphire for pickling, as you'd never have done it."

"She wouldn't ax nought but a fool."

Godbear laughed again, but did not answer, and a moment later he had swung across the Devil's Tight-Rope and departed. He then followed his right hand along the gorse-clad cliffs and passed westward where Daleham climbed up a green hill from the brink of the sea. The little whitewashed, tar-pitched dwellings clustered along the harbour, and ascended upwards and backwards to the high lands.

Jonathan presently stopped at a cottage door, glanced up and down the steep and

narrow street of cobble-stones, then, seeing that he was not observed, lifted the latch and walked in.

"Here you be, Margery," he said abruptly, holding out his green salad of samphire to a woman who was tending a roasting rabbit at the fire.

She turned and showed a pretty little face, set in pale golden hair, and a plump figure clad in black with a white apron.

"What a reckless twoad of a chap you be, Jonathan! I never dreamed you'd think again 'bout that. To risk your neck for that rubbishy stuff!"

"Womanlike you be to hanker arter it, an' whine arter it for a month o' Sundays, then turn your purty nose up at it now 'tis in your hand."

"'Tis awnly rubbishy in comparison wi' a man's neck, I mean. Never seed better leaves, I must allow."

Widow Bland was five-and-twenty, and lived with her stepson William. Now a curious little drama of four fast approached its climax; for, comely above common, and possessed of a fixed income since her elderly

husband's departure, Margery Bland seemed little likely to wear her widow's weeds much longer than decency demanded.

Two men were at her service in the shape of Jonathan Godbear and Robert Bluett; but for neither could she find in her heart a definite answer, because each possessed qualities beyond common. While Bluett's high reputation and regular employment promised a mate worthy of her respect as well as regard, the other man's better looks, better temper, and lighter heart attracted her even against her judgment; for about Jonathan there was an air of romance and adventure that naturally appealed to her woman's nature. His very presents smelt of mystery, and spoke of dare-devil deeds done under darkness. Mr. Bluett, on the contrary, appeared the incarnation of the stolid, practical, sensible, and matter-of-fact. His own calling, full enough of incident in those days, was never glorified between his lips, and incidents of the most romantic and exciting nature acquired a drab and sordid flavour from his unimpassioned description of them.

The bitter feud between her suitors was

not unfamiliar to Margery, and she knew, though not from those involved, that twice Godbear had hoodwinked and baffled the exciseman on critical occasions; but these delicate matters never reached her tongue, nor was the name of his rival spoken in the widow's presence by either of her admirers. Yet Bill Bland, the fourth character in the little play, exhibited violent partisanship. He was a hardy, energetic youngster of twenty, and his choice rather unexpectedly fell upon Mr. Bluett, whose forbidding exterior and dry virtues might have been supposed unlikely to inspire him. Bill's reasons, however, were sound from his own point of view. Jonathan had once thrashed him on Daleham Quay for somewhat too public comments thrown out by young Bland as to Godbear's way of living; and the indignity, though now two years old, was not forgotten or forgiven. Bill, indeed, hated his stepmother's good-looking suitor with a great hatred, and always supported Bluett to the best of his power. He also assisted the officer against Jonathan and his friends when opportunity offered, and had admittedly on

one occasion overheard a secret, and spoilt an important stroke of business.

Now, while a few compliments passed between man and woman, and Jonathan regarded with frank, earthly admiration the bright-haired widow, young Bland entered and frowned at the smuggler, while Mr. Godbear beamed back in a manner very disconcerting. Then Bill called aloud for his dinner.

"I be full o' business," he said.

"So gude as a gauger you've grawed lately, they tell me," said Jonathan pleasantly. "A tower o' strength an' very useful to Bluett an' his men. Wonder is them bowl-dacious smuggling rascals dare shaw their faces nowadays."

"You think you'm very funny, no doubt, but you'll laugh wrong side o' your mouth some day, an' Michael Cramphorn tu," said Bill bitterly.

Now Mr. Cramphorn was Jonathan's bosom companion in wickedness—an old man grown grey at his business, and one who made up by wide experience and cunning for his ancient carcass and physical

uselessness when blows had to be struck. Daleham uneasily but proudly admitted that these two and their sworn ally, the devil, were a match for the keenest officers ever commissioned to keep brandy, tobacco, French laces and other commodities out of a Devonshire fishing village.

Jonathan shook his head at young Bland's prediction.

"A bad auld blid, Cramphorn," he said. "Far gone on the broad road him—an' auld tu—a shocking bad companion for youth, I'm sure. Doan't 'e have nothin' to do along wi' un, my son."

"I'll lay you both by the heels yet," blazed Bill furiously, "so help me, I will."

Jonathan smiled and nodded, while Mrs. Bland addressed her stepson.

"Eat your meat," she said sharply, "and mind your awn business, Bill. You ban't a Excise officer, an' you've no right to talk like this here to grawn men whether or no."

"Well said, Margery ; an' 'tis just what I had 'casion to speak to 'ciseman Bluett not half an hour agoone 'pon the Head. He thought I was a-squintin' for French lugger

bwoats, 'stead o' mackerel—bwoats as might be laden wi' brandy an' Hollands an' all manner o' heathen devilries."

"An' so you was, I lay; an' so was Cramphorn," burst out Bill. "An' when the wind changed, which it done twenty minutes ago, he cocked his evil auld eye an' shook his head, an' said, 'That anointed rascal Jonathan'll be glad 'bout this, for theer's a furriner beatin' 'bout off shore as he'll be watchin' closer'n a hawk watches a mouse.'"

Jonathan pulled a long face and winked at angry Bill.

"That auld man be enough to make a vartuous chap—well! Dragging my name in the dirt like that! I'll have the law of Cramphorn for libellious speech—see if I doan't! An' to think that I happen to know this very night that bald sinner be helpin' to run a cargo 'pon the Ore Rocks under the Head! Theer! 'Tis out, an' I doan't care who hears me say it neither, for I've no common patience wi' such outlandish doin's in a Christian land."

Despite his indignation, however, Bill

noted that Jonathan now prepared to depart; and it was well that he did so, for scarcely had his back turned when Mr. Bluett appeared. Unlike Jonathan, he knocked respectfully at the widow's door, and when she opened it, addressed her ceremoniously.

"Be Bill within, Mrs. Bland? I do want a word with him partickler."

"Come in, Mr. Bluett," said Margery. "Come in, an' pick a bit o' rabbit, an' welcome. Bill's at his meat."

"An' like your gudeness to ax me; but theer's no time for eatin' just now. I'm like to be main busy 'fore nightfall, by the look of it. May I step in the kitchen an' see your stepson half a minute?"

A moment later Bluett appeared before young Bland, shut the kitchen door, flung Jonathan's samphire off a chair on to the ground, and sat down opposite his lieutenant.

Each had similar news, for both had gathered during the morning that a cargo was to be run that night, and Bluett had seen the strange lugger lying out to sea full fifteen miles away. From Daleham she

was invisible, but at the Head a good view through his glasses rewarded the exciseman after his enemy's departure.

"One place they won't be, an' that's Ore Rocks," said Bland, "for that's wheer Godbear's just told me they are gwaine to run a cargo. Dead Man's Hole be more likely, with the wind wheer 'tis. He was in here play-actin' just 'fore you comed."

"Ess, Dead Man's Hole or else Lovers' Combe. Us must look up both plaaces—the fust from shore, the second by water."

They talked of signals and made rapid plans; then Bill departed with his orders, and Mr. Bluett prepared to start for the headquarters of the Coastguard and make all ready. By despatching a horseman to the next station he would be able to command ten armed men by nightfall.

But Margery came into the kitchen a moment before the other left it. She flushed to see Godbear's samphire on the floor, picked it up, dusted it, and spoke.

"You'm terrible hard on Merry Jonathan," she said.

The officer started to hear the banished

subject on Mrs. Bland's tongue, but answered very promptly, nevertheless.

"Every honest man should be, I reckon."

"He've got a kindly heart whether or no."

"A smugglin' rascal!"

Margery Bland sighed.

"Wish you was better friends, I'm sure."

"Be dog an' rat gude friends? 'Tis contrary to nature."

"He've got his gude points."

"An' hides 'em so careful as he hides other things not needful to name."

"He'm tu clever by half for some of us, I know."

Mr. Bluett shut his teeth like a trap.

"Wait," he said.

She tried to read his face, but failed.

"Have somethin' to drink, seeing you'll eat nought," she suggested, changing the subject.

But he shook his head, and suddenly plunged at the main great question.

"'Tis time you made choice between me—a plain-dealin' man—an' t'other. Lard o' Light! but I should have thought you'd seed through this caddlin', loafin', gude-for-

nothin' afore now. I s'pose none be so blind as them that won't see."

He spoke with the utmost bitterness.

"Would you have picked samphire off the Head for me, Robert Bluett?" she asked evasively.

"No, by God I wouldn't, ma'am! Ban't no part of a man's dooty to risk his life for a bunch o' green stuff. I'd have said this: 'If I slips an' breaks my neck, her life's unhappy for all time. An' I loves her tu well to risk that for her sake so well as my awn.'"

"You'm a masterful man, Robert."

"I'm in solemn, sober earnest all times, Mrs. Bland. I love you heart an' sawl; an' I'd rather see you in your coffin than mated along wi' that evil twoad, as'll most surely break your heart sooner or late if you take un. He might play his wicked tunes on 'e for twenty year or more, you so young as you are. Not but what you'll be a hempen widow 'fore that."

"Doan't 'e say no such terrible wisht things to me, theer's a gude sawl. You make a body feel as if you was a holy prophet of evil out the Book."

"Doan't want no prophet—no Isaiah nor Jeremiah nor Daniel neither—to cast the end of Jonathan Godbear."

"Yet he could go an' pluck this here for me."

Mr. Bluett turned impatiently to go.

"Well, us won't waste words. Awnly you'll do wisely to decide, for life's short; an' waitin', same as this, be hell-hard to a man of my make, though it may be easy to t'other."

He departed and shut the cottage door after him with unnecessary vigour; while Margery Bland, without visible emotion, weighed the great problem before her, and nibbled fragments of the aromatic samphire leaves while she reflected.

II

A stifling and misty summer night crowded down on Daleham, and the wind, now in the south-west, puffed and lapsed, and puffed and lapsed again, set eddies of dust twirling at the corners of the village

alleys, then dropped them dead, as if by magic. But over the sea, advancing against the wind, came darkness and a solid bank of clouds. The world was thirsty, for it had been scorched through a long month, and now the August foliage whispered in the woodlands, and the lupins, orange lilies, and sweet sultans in cottage gardens, catching the murmur, spread glad news of rain.

Prosaic Robert Bluett, his heart beating no quicker than usual, but a sort of double exultation hidden deep therein, laid his plans with the care of a general. Two other men beside the coastguards from his own and the next station reinforced him, and with this party of a dozen stalwart souls, well armed, he entered upon the duties of the night. Six of the force were told off to Dead Man's Hole—a favourite spot for running of contraband, three miles from Daleham, where the red cliffs were honey-combed with caves; while Bluett himself, with the rest of his detachment, put to sea one hour before midnight and patrolled the silent bay.

Over a sea deathly still, six stout men slowly pulled the Excise officer; and hope sang a song to the throb of the muffled oars, for something told Bluett that he was upon the brink of a dual success. He hoped much from the widow's manner that morning; he trusted, too, that his turn had come in the encounter with Merry Jonathan. "Once he be in clink she'll come round," reflected Robert, "for sure theer's no more forcible argument than Exeter Gaol."

Seawards the bank of clouds rose higher and higher, and stretched uncanny fingers over the hazy stars. As two hours passed, as great darkness ascended to the zenith, and no sign promised success, the coast-guard's hopes waned a little. But then, on the black face of the cliffs, and at a point where a lonely combe opened upon the shore and the murmuring waterfall of the little dale could be heard at sea in the surrounding silence, there twinkled out a green light. It flickered for a moment, then burnt steadily, and another of similar colour almost immediately appeared beside it. Like the unblinking eyes of some monstrous nocturnal

beast bent upon the sea, the smuggler's signal burned.

"Lovers' Combe! So that's the game! Give way, my hearties!"

The muffled thud of the oars on their pins, and the soft suck at the end of each stroke as the blades left the water, continued for a while. Then red haze of distant lightnings threw up huge shadowy peaks and pinnacles seawards, painted with a flash of light the tremendous depths and altitudes of the coming clouds, and leapt in a ghostly tangle along the edge of the sea.

"Ship oars!"

The oars came home and the boat lipped and chuckled through the still water, then lost way and rocked to the movement of Bluett, who left the tiller and rose to his feet. From afar came a woolly growl of thunder.

"Keep your weather eyes liftin' for the next flash. If she's in sight we'll board her right away, but I'm fearing she won't be. Even a frog-eater wouldn't care for his craft to be catched loafin' on a lee shore wi' that foul weather blawin' up against him."

It lightened once more, and the flame

leapt along the awful precipices of the clouds, vanished, and reappeared again in a nearer pile. Though forked, it was brilliant enough to paint the cliffs and sea with scorching clearness, to fling black shadows over the wan red forehead of the shore, and to illuminate the waters vividly about the revenue boat ; but no dark hull, no flapping sail shared the lonely sea with Mr. Bluett and his friends.

“ Stood out again while the wind held, I'll wager, and the land-lubbers ashore doan't knaw it, seemin'ly. Ban't no manner o' use landin' here. Us'll pull round to Dead Man's Hole 'fore the storm breaks, beach the boat till marnin', tell our mates they've not come ashore, an' get home to Daleham by road.”

Without comment, Mr. Bluett's crew settled down to their work, and the boat turned round and proceeded westerly down the coast. The green lights still shone steadily ashore, while hurrying catpaws of hot wind leapt along the sea, and the thunder, gaining volume, rumbled and bellowed and echoed sharply with reverberations from the cliffs. The boat had

scarcely proceeded a mile when a steady breath came from the eastern darkness, and the inky waters began to be slashed and puckered, while the tops of the increasing ripples tumbled over with a sharp, crisp tinkle. The noise of the approaching storm was also apparent between the thunder peals, and a strange, sinister hum, as of a multitude of unknown things advancing out of darkness, fell upon the listening ear. It was the roar of torrential rains churning over a savage sea and flying forward on the wings of a gale of wind.

"Us won't be their none tu quick if you chaps can't push her along faster than we'm gwaine," said Bluett. "Give way, can't 'e? This ban't a party o' pleasure."

The men grunted and mended their stroke, but even then the heavy boat made but slow progress, and soon the fringe of the storm was near, the song of it had risen to a shriek, and ghostly foam ridges hissed and chattered along the gunwales of the coast-guardsmen's craft. Now Dead Man's Hole lay right ahead, and a nasty sea was already running into the mouth of it, but continual

dazzle of lightning simplified the skipper's difficulties. He rose, gripped the tiller, felt the sullen heave of the boat as she got into the landward surges—the great giant pulse of the sea on the shallows—then roared to his crew to pull with their might. Heavy as lead she wallowed in the foaming broken water; then she was swept on her way, half swamped by a wild black wave whose scalp of spindrift, torn off by the gale, drenched her crew; and finally she took the ground in the midst of seething, screaming chaos, how far from shore only Bluett could tell. He, however, felt assured of his position. The place was familiar to him, and he knew that the tremendous undertow was here broken by a ridge of rocks that he had seen grinning out of the foam on his starboard bow a few moments before. In a second the men were overboard thigh deep, and then, with a lusty pull as the next wave came in, they dragged both the boat and Mr. Bluett high and dry. Soon the craft was emptied and made ship-shape, then drawn into the shelter of a cave above high-water mark.

Of these matters the other detachment had seen a little by lightning flashes, and now a scout came down from a hiding-place on the cliff to reconnoitre. He quickly discovered that he was among his friends, and five minutes later the bands united. Here, too, no sign of the smugglers had rewarded three hours of patience under trying conditions. But some news the party at Dead Man's Hole could furnish. Half an hour after the beginning of their vigil, young Bill Bland had burst upon them in the wildest impatience and excitement, and brought evil news that the smugglers had run their cargo after all.

"Dancing mad, he were," said an old coastguardsman, "an' begged us for the love of the Lard to go along wi' un. But bein' under orders, of course us couldn't move hand nor foot to do any such thing. Then he raged off in a proper tear to find 'e—even talked o' gwaine on the watter after 'e; but by the time he got to the harbour I reckon 'twas blowin' tu hard for un to get to sea."

The united forces under Bluett now started through the very heart of the storm to re-

turn to Daleham, and two of the younger and fleeter men were despatched at the double to find Bland, if possible, and learn from him at what point attack might yet be made on the enemy. But no sign of Bill came through the glare and soak of the storm, and once more in Daleham, Bluett, too well aware that he had failed again and that nothing more could be done under existing circumstances, dismissed his men. All were drenched to the skin and weary with futile watching. All, therefore, fell out and returned very thankfully to their quarters; but for their leader this was a hard blow enough, and he tramped to the station alone with a heart as black as the night, with a riot of passion in his soul as savage as the elemental chaos. He purposed to go down to the quay on the chance of seeing Bill; then, his road lying before Margery Bland's cottage, he determined to call there and learn if she had any news of her stepson. Weary, wrathful, sick at heart was the exciseman now; he even felt some unreasonable aggravation with Bill Bland, and he hoped that the youth was mistaken in his report. For

had the cargo really been run, it must reflect unpleasantly on Bluett's capacity to fill his present position, and, even though his failure did not reach headquarters, it would certainly set the countryside laughing again at his expense. He therefore trusted that Bland had erred or been misinformed by those who wished no good to the cause of justice and honesty.

Though he was not at home when the disappointed officer called at Widow Bland's cottage, Margery possessed some news of her stepson. Bill had, in fact, left a message behind him, which directed that, should Bluett call at the cottage in his homeward way, he was to proceed as swiftly as possible to the Devil's Tight-Rope, where his scout would meet him.

"I bid him go to no such evil place on such a night, but my words was water, an' away he went—wild an' pixy-led, by the look of un. An' I caught the words 'Jonathan be on Ore Rocks yet,' as he trapsed off."

"Ore Rocks! How long ago?"

"Might be a half-hour."

"I'll run after 'em then. Somebody shall

smart for what I've suffered to-night, by God they shall!"

"Surely that ban't Robert Bluett speaking such crooked words? Doan't 'e go, doan't 'e go at all. Let my hot-headed young fule of a stepson cool his heels in the storm instead. I wager it won't hurt un."

"I must, I tell you; 'tis duty."

"Not if I ax you not, Robert. Bide away to please me. Ban't I more to 'e than these gashly auld smugglers?"

The man feared treachery.

"I must go—no more talk now. Best you go in out this awful weather. See what a jakes of a mess you'm gettin' in."

"Step inside just a minute; I want to talk to 'e 'bout something partickler."

But each word from her increased his suspicions.

"Another time, Mrs. Bland. I can't afford to make no more mistakes. Theer's some jackets as'll have to dry in clink to-night, an' Merry Jonathan's be one."

"You won't hear me then?"

"Not now—not now. You must keep your news for a while."

Under the lightning Margery's pretty face had grown red with anger.

"Theer's some news won't keep," she said; "but I'll get in out o' the weather if you'm that churlish. Tweern't very interesting, after all. Awnly to tell 'e as I've made up my mind betwixt you an' Jonathan Godbear. Gude night to you, an' pleasant dreams, I'm sure!"

The cottage door slammed in his face, and before he could open it, a bolt grated on the other side.

So Bluett stood with the rain pouring off his garments, and not another soul in the street but the devil and himself. The word was spoken, and harshly spoken. The double success he had hoped for was turned into a double failure. The unrighteous continued to flourish like the green bay tree, fortunate in wickedness and blessed in love; while, for his own part, Bluett felt that he had failed in everything. His credit and reputation were tossed to the storm; his private hopes of future happiness were ruined and annihilated. The God he followed and obeyed had deserted him; but

no day of reckoning was promised, and his enemy went triumphant and unscathed.

Now Robert Bluett determined that the future should fall out otherwise. His own life he valued at nothing, and the things learned at his mother's knee, the precepts, dogmas, beliefs that he had followed from his youth up, were spurned on the hurricane. They should guide him and guard him no more. Blindly he passed down the shining street, where lightning transformed the slate roofs into sheets of fire. The thatched eaves and the windows beneath them, gazing like bleared eyes from the ancient white-wash, were changed into the heads of giants, thrust upward, haggard and wrinkled, to listen to the last trump. The man grew mad under the jagged dazzle of the sky, and roared against the roar of the thunder, and called on the God of storms to give him the blood of his enemy.

Unconsciously he moved in the direction of his home ; then, suddenly aware that he stood before his own door, he entered, took a carbine from the Government rack, loaded it, and departed again where the flaming

masses of the autumn furze glared ghostly under intermittent light from above.

At a point above the tremendous ridge of the Tight-Rope, Bluett stopped. Before him opened the little track where rose the pathway from Ore Rocks, and lying down not fifteen yards from it, behind a boulder, he calmly cocked his carbine and waited. For him the world only held one being then, and he believed that man to be upon the beach below, as Widow Bland had heard her stepson say. Presently he would appear; and then the madman behind the gun meant settling all accounts. In a lightning flash he lifted his weapon and trained it point-blank upon the cleft in the rock. Jonathan Godbear, his triumph perfected, would presently rise in the embrasure of the path, and as he did so, his tale would be told, and he would tumble backwards a corpse, to be washed to lobsters and conger eels by the waves that battled on the limestone beneath. How he had learned of the smuggler's presence below he did not stop to remember; the fact that Bill Bland had left a message for him was forgotten; he

only knew his first foe on earth must presently pass that way, and he waited and watched and told himself that Merry Jonathan's thread was spun.

Sheer steadfast fiend, the man sat on under the waning storm; then came a moment when through the uncertain light a dark object filled the little gap, and a second later a man with his brains blown out must have descended to the beach, three hundred feet below; but Bill Bland's career had not yet reached its allotted limit, and a kindly flash of lightning saved him as Bluett's finger tightened on trigger. The exciseman, steadied for a moment before escape from a hideous catastrophe, rose to his feet, left his gun under the stone, and came forward.

"At last—tu late!" gasped Bill, out of breath with his climb. "Oh, I could spit blood to think of this night's work! On Ore Rocks, the very plaace he told me—under the nose of Daleham—an' you 'pon the sea, and t'others away miles off; but 'twas all over an' done most before you'd swallowed your supper. Them of the lugger

knawed—they knawed what was brewin' in the elements. So she stood in under the Head an' got the stuff on the beach most before daylight was out the sky. Then she runned for it."

"Wheer's Jonathan Godbear to?"

"He'm below yet—awnly him. But stuff's all took away inland by the road through the wood."

"I seed a signal at Lovers' Combe way."

"'Twas a blind, then—set theer for 'e by Godbear, or wan of t'others."

"Awnly him left; an' he'll come up this way for choice."

"Ess; wi' many a wrap of furrin lace under his jersey, I'll swear. You an' me be strong enough to take un. I'd have tried single-handed, but knawed it weern't no use. But two, wi' the law 'pon their side——"

Bluett reflected, as far as the ferment in his brain would allow him to do so. He desired to meet Jonathan Godbear alone. To take him was not his purpose now. A red-hot revenge was all his desire. But

Bland had to be dealt with first, and removed as quickly as possible.

"No chance must be lost. He may go t'other way," said Bluett.

"Ban't likely."

"But there's the chance of it. Go you up-long so quick as your legs will take you; call for Thomas Broad, an' him an' you go down to the wood road an' bide by the well. Then he can't go clear, come what will. Tell Broad to take arms, an' if the man shaws fight, cut him down like you would a mad dog."

"He won't go that way."

"No matter. There's the chance. Us mustn't risk nothing."

"You'm like to need help to——"

"Doan't stand talkin' 'bout it. Get going. If you'm the true man I take you for, you'll do as I ax you. Go to the Combe Road along wi' Broad. The gude work as you've done this night won't be forgot, I warn 'e. Bide to the trees at the cross-ways till I come to you."

"I'll go, then; but God He knaws I'd sooner share this job with you. I've had

about enough running about for one night, I should think."

III

Bland departed in very ill humour, and the exciseman, returning to his gun again, crouched beneath the rock, and again took careful aim at the gap. Long he waited, his nerves tense, his heart and soul set upon one desperate deed. Then the dying fires of the sky that had been kind to widow Bland's stepson were apparently unkind to her lover, for again a flash danced along the skirts of the departed storm, and by their wan illumination, served to show a shiny object filling the gap not fifteen yards from the muzzle of Bluett's carbine. He waited, then fired; whereon the gap so suddenly filled was emptied again as suddenly. The gun bellowed, and mingled its echoes with the last clap of thunder. But, under this wider noise, the murderer heard strange sounds—an explosion of agony, a struggle, and then, after silence, the sickening thud

of a body on the rocks two hundred feet below. He pictured what was lying there at the fringe of the sea ; then he rose up and departed. His promise to Bland he forgot ; indeed, all things passed from his mind—all but one crushed, mangled, lifeless creature that waited for the water to gather it up and bear it into those dark and secret places, hidden from human eyes, where the sea man-eaters dwell.

Slowly he returned home, and by gradual degrees black horror gripped him as the significance of the deed that he had done dawned in his frantic mind. The air was full of fleering, jeering fiends, that laughed and mocked and chattered, and showed him the madness of this personal malice. Yet, by the very nature of their relations as exciseman and smuggler, the man knew that his crime would never be called murder. It remained for him to invent a lie. But he was beyond the power of reflection or balanced thought. He only knew that he had destroyed Margery Bland's lover and taken a fellow-creature's life in cold blood by calculated design. Henceforth he must

live with that knowledge, and live with it unshared. He entered the headquarters of the Coastguard, where he dwelt, shut the door behind him, placed his carbine in a rack among the rest, then struck a match and lighted a little oil lamp. As he did so the light revealed a white patch on the floor by the outer door, and he saw that a letter had been thrust beneath it during his absence. The man approached it and picked it up with his thoughts far otherwise employed. Then he found it wet from the rain, and knew that it had been but recently thrust there.

He took it to the light, and the superscription woke him from his gloomy dreams and chained his attention, for the letter came from widow Bland. He made no haste to read the missive, but flung it down on the fender to dry, then removed his boots and soaking coat, and turned up his sleeves. He was shivering a little from the long exposure and the events that occupied it; and now, seeking a cupboard, he produced a tumbler and a bottle of spirits, then helped

himself liberally. Next he turned to the steaming letter, picked it up and read it.

Thus the widow had written :—

"Dear Mr. Bluett,—For I'm most feared to call 'e 'Robert' after this evening, when you was pleased to be so short with me. Still, and whether or no, this comes hopping as you didn't take no offence against me for slamming the door. We was both a bit comical-tempered, I reckon—leastways, you 'peared so to be, and that made me the same. So I've written to you, and I'll walk through the rain to leave the letter. And I send it out of fear, as you might miss my meaning and fret and grizzle about it by night, 'cause I very well know you do love me. I reckon, come to think around it, that Jonathan Godbear's manner of life be a thought too oneasy for a piece like me, what only axes for everything quiet and easy and sweet, and couldn't abide to have a sord of justice hanging up awver-head and likest to fall by night. So I'll take you for better or worse when you please. And Godbear knows it. Which was what I was going to tell you when you made me get into a flare and put to the door against you. Hopping as you changed your things and got dry flannel next your skin and took a drop of summat hot when you went home, I remain, my dear Robert, your obedient, faithful servant, Margaret Bland. And I do think as you'll be a kind, good husband to me, else I wouldn't take you."

The man dropped the letter, stared into space, then lifted his head in agony, and shook both fists upwards—shook them heavenward, and cursed the juggling spinners who had thus tangled, rent, and smeared with blood the orderly fabric of his life. Albeit a passionate soul, he had fought against his failing stoutly enough until to-day. Now the inner fury, that he believed long since slain by years of self-restraint, had broken loose and hurried him red-hot to a brutal murder, while the dearest treasure earth held for him was only waiting his word.

Through a brief space of battling emotions Robert Bluett thought that he would defy his fate, and resume the level road of his life on the other side of that black chasm cleft into it by the night's work; but his hardihood was not proof against the overwhelming situation; he saw only one way by which a man accursed could win back to peace; so with dazed mind and unsettled gait he rose, like one dreaming, walked slowly to the gun rack and took down his carbine again.

"I'll fire wance more," he said. "Theer's nothin' left but that. Then she'm free of me, an' belike he'll have his revenge down under."

He loaded the weapon, tied a string to the trigger, and placed the butt upon the floor. Then he rubbed its cold barrel against his forehead and felt that the gun was his last friend.

"He can tear our hearts out—curse Him. He can break us upon His wheel and return evil for good and conjure with our lives to make the devils laugh ; but we'm stronger than Him here and theer. We can end the dance when we'm minded to an' things grow past bearin'. Theer'll be tantara about it for a week, then all's forgot." He bent his head over the carbine, twisted his neck, and put his ear to the muzzle ; then he felt for the string with his foot. But at the same moment he remembered Mrs. Bland's letter, set down the gun, tore the widow's confession of regard into many fragments and burnt it. Instantly he returned to his chosen death, and was once more ready to end all, the shortest way that he knew,

when a sharp and sudden rap at the outer door arrested him. For a moment he hesitated whether to answer the summons or complete his present task ; but he decided to go, and did so.

Slowly he proceeded down the passage, slowly opened the door ; then he fell back a step and his eyes rolled and glared, and the skin on his scalp crawled. A man stood within a yard of him, the man he had destroyed but a few minutes before. An oil lamp flickered at the corner of the street, and Bluett recognised the features of his enemy ; but ghostly they were not. Indeed, Merry Jonathan grinned genially, and advanced as the exciseman retreated.

"Didn't expect to see me, eh? No, I'll lay a crown to a shirt-button you didn't. An' yet they tell me as you've been lookin' about uncommon sharp all the evening, you an' Billy Bland. A funny happorth to cut a pennorth out of, he be!"

"You!" said the other with a sort of choked cry that surprised Jonathan not a little, for he could not see Bluett's face.

"Ess fay! Though you'm right to be a bit astonished, I grant."

"Thank God—thank God for all His gert gudeness!" said the other, still staring as though the man before him was a spectre.

"You'm rather pleased to see me, by the look of it! A rum world, to be sure—a topsy-turvy auld airth as ever was. I'll come in, if you'll allow, an' drink just three fingers. I've got more than the worth of that for 'e."

The other did not answer, but turned, and Jonathan followed him. The smuggler carried a sack, which he dropped by the fire.

"Drink what you need—drink deep," said Bluett, his voice gruff and tremulous. "I want to be your friend from this day, Jonathan Godbear, as I've been your enemy in time past. Things have falled out—terrible things. I've been in the hand o' the devil, an' I've wrestled wi' angels an' lost."

"It's made 'e purty weak in the hams tu, by the look of 'e."

"You've saved a gert sinner from death an' hell, if you but knawed it."

"What! Look you here, you've drunk enough, seemin'ly, an' theer's a damn wild turn to your eyes, like a horse what be gwaine to run away. But to my story; an' fust I'm bound to tell 'e as that unholy auld swine Michael Cramphorn—shame on his grey hairs, I sez—have had a mighty haul o' French fishes this night. No such cargo ever was run Daleham way, I reckon—bad auld blid, I blush for un. On Ore Rocks tu! Wheer I told Bill Bland. But he knawed better, an' wouldn't believe me. Young chaps be so wise nowadays. An' me—I was takin' the air on the beach—bein', as you might say, a partickler pleasant evenin' for a stroll, an' when I'd got enough thunder and lightnin' I ordained to come up along. But thunder's gude for trouble, I reckon, an' sore let be I, 'cause Widow Bland have decided against me. This arternoon it was. You said right 'bout the samphire, I doubt. I lost her by the cussed stuff. Because my life be all samphire-gathering—of wan sort or another. Well,

up from the beach I comed just now, along the path wheer the goats and sheep crosses the Tight-Rope—a kicklish plaace, I warn 'e; but you an' me could find our way blindfolded, I reckon; an' just as I was movin' up the path, nearly stugged in the new mud, theer comed a thunder-crack as made the rocks shake to the root of the Head; an' then a rush in the air an' a gert black thing falled down-long past my earhole wi'in six inches of me. A step more an' 'twould have dropped 'pon my head. Down he comes wi' a crash on the beach; an' fust I thought as 'twas a rock, an' next that it might be some poor devil of a man; but 'tweern't neither—awnly a gert, huge otter, on his way to the Ore Rocks, I reckon, or else comin' up from below by same road as me. Anyhow, he'd missed stays in the storm, poor beast, an' falled over the precipice an' knocked the life out of hissself. He'm outside in a sack I got from a locker on the beach, and I've brought un to you, 'cause I know you've got a order to take all you can, an' theer's gude money to it. So theer you are, an' maybe 'twill ease your

mind for not laying your hands 'pon—that auld rascal, Cramphorn.”

Robert Bluett murmured something, and the other, getting his sack, shook from it a very heavy dog-otter.

Then, without more words, Jonathan went his way; and when he was out of earshot, the exciseman slowly, stiffly sank on to his knees, clasped his hands, and so remained for an hour in the attitude of prayer, while his eyes were fixed upon the battered, bleeding beast extended upon the hearth-stone.

THE END

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS,	2
POETRY,	12
BELLES LETTRES, ANTHOLOGIES, ETC.	12
ILLUSTRATED AND GIFT BOOKS,	16
HISTORY,	17
BIOGRAPHY,	19
TRAVEL, ADVENTURE AND TOPOGRAPHY,	21
NAVAL AND MILITARY,	23
GENERAL LITERATURE,	24
PHILOSOPHY,	26
SCIENCE,	27
THEOLOGY,	27
FICTION,	32
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS,	42
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY,	42
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES,	42
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY	43
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS,	44
EDUCATIONAL BOOKS,	44

OCTOBER 1901

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